

# Biscuit

The Love Story of a Rescue Dog



Daryl Novak



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Dear Ellen + Pete;  
As former 'dog people'  
I hope you  
enjoy this.  
Daf  
Hx  
Aug 2015

Daryl Novak

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Dedicated to the memory of Patrick Colicchia  
and to the work of  
Pomeranian and Small Breed Rescue



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# Prologue

My name is Biscuit, but many of my friends and family called me Bisky. Actually, my name ended up being Neapolitan Biscuit of the Parkway, CD, CGN, but that is for later in the story.

My Alpha Dad, Daryl, is the one who wrote all this down for me. In the interest of full disclosure, you, the reader, should know that I have already crossed over the Rainbow Bridge. I inspired my dad to tell my story for me for two important reasons.

First of all, as long as we are alive, either as humans or dogs, no matter how dire things get, there is always hope. I had some really bad breaks, and at times thought life could not get any worse, but I always dreamt that it would get better, and it did.

Secondly, my message is that with death, hope ends, but so does illness and suffering. Yet in death, one's legacy lives on in the memories of those one has touched. I don't know exactly why I had the effect on people I did, but I know for them the memory of me will be forever strong.



# Early Days

No one knows exactly when or where I was born, or even with certainty what breed I was supposed to be.

The wonderful thing about dogs with questionable backgrounds is that no one knows anything for sure. Various veterinarians put my birth date somewhere around 2000, but nothing as specific as the month. Who knows, perhaps I was *the* Y2K dog, arriving just after midnight, but no one noticed because everyone was so glad that the world's computers didn't crash. More likely I was born sometime into the year. This meant that my birthday celebrations were always a bit of a moving target, and sometimes, when things were bad, got missed all together.

As for where I was born and under what conditions, who knows? Did I come from a puppy farm in Kansas and get shipped to a pet store where some uninformed and unsuspecting, but well-meaning, though impetuous

people bought me as a purebred Pomeranian? Or did I come from a reputable breeder and was a genetic throwback to Pomeranians of old, when my enormity at just over 17 pounds would have been the norm or even on the small side? Was I dispensed to a “pet home,” since I would be laughed out of any show ring? Or was I a deliberate plan of a rogue breeder who promotes Victorian Poms, even though they are the anathema of the American and Canadian kennel clubs?

The Pomeranian is a member of the Spitz breed group. The term German Spitz refers to a small group of Spitz breeds which include Mittlespitz (including the American Eskimo Dog, a complete misnomer as neither American nor Eskimo by origin), Wolfspitz or Keeshond, Grossspitz, Kleinspitz, and finally Zwergspitz, or Pomeranian. Unfortunately, in Canada, of this list only the Keeshond, Pomeranian, and more latterly the American (Canadian) Eskimo, are recognized breeds. So we Victorian Poms are simply outcasts, for after years of selective breeding, we lost our name to creatures weighing less than the average Sunday roast. Don't get me started. But I digress.

If you are a Labradoodle or a Cockapoo reading this, one day you will be an accepted breed, because that is how new breeds start. But it will not be in your lifetime or that of your great-great-great-grand offspring. Some breeders seem to forget that the current officially recognized breeds did not arrive on earth and in kennel club breed standards fully formed, as the canine equivalents of

Adam and Eve. Breed standards are not the same worldwide. If I had been born in Europe, I would have been a good specimen of a Kleinspitz or Mittelspitz, breeds that are essentially large or Victorian Pomeranians.

Most Spitz-type dogs have wedge-shaped heads with short, erect ears. The smaller ones can have a distinct fox-like appearance, and *volpino*, as in the Italian Spitz breed Volpino Italiano, means little fox.

The breed standard for a Pomeranian, according to the Canadian Kennel Club, is of a small dog between four and seven pounds, standing five to eleven inches high at the withers. Of course, everyone knows what the withers are, I guess. (It is the ridge between the shoulder blades of a four-legged animal.) Compact but sturdy dogs, they have abundant textured coats and highly plumed tails set high and flat. The top coat forms a ruff of hair on the neck and back, and there is feathery hair on the hindquarters. Poms come in the widest variety of colours of any dog breed (eat your hearts out, Bichons and Malteses), including white, black, red, orange, blue, sable, black and tan, brown and tan, spotted, brindle, and combinations. The most common colours are orange, black, or cream/white. I had the colourings of a Pom - I was a lovely biscuit colour (hence my name) with some black and grey tips. I think this means I was a perfect example of a sable.

I definitely looked like a Pom, with a gently shaped muzzle, teddy-bear ears, a tail that never completely uncurled, even when I was totally relaxed, and of course big brown eyes, and a long luxurious coat. This would all prove important later when I was to register for competitive obedience.

I also had many of the mannerisms of a Pom, some of which were not at times appreciated. So many generalizations about breeds and breed types have done irreparable harm to innocent dogs and responsible owners, such as breed specific legislation in Ontario, that I almost hate to make any statements about my breed. On the other hand, most dog breed books will try to tell a bit about the less than stellar qualities, but couched in such a way as not to offend, and in a way that does not dissuade anyone really keen on a breed. "Is more secure in a single pet home," usually means that type of dog will try to kill anything smaller than it is, and "Is more suited to a rural working environment," means you will go nuts if you try to keep this dog on anything less than 40 acres.

While it has become socially unacceptable to associate characteristics other than physical ones with any race in the human family, it is still acceptable to describe characteristics associated with dog breeds. Many, of course, relate to the origins of various breeds, such as terriers that were bred to hunt vermin (most of them will chase anything small), or Border Collies, who were and still are sheepherders who will try their best to round up

anything that moves, be it smaller dogs, children, or even guests at a garden party.

One behaviour description for Poms states that they are lively and friendly. Check mark on this one. They love to be around their owners but can suffer from separation anxiety when left alone. Double check mark here. They can be defensive and bark excessively. Well, sometimes, perhaps. They can be very successful in getting what they want and manipulate their owners. Okay, now it is getting a bit nasty, so let's move on.

Yes, I could be stubborn, bark a lot, be nippy, and try to take over. I did all of that by the time I got to my first real home, but it was never my true nature, and I had already been through a lot by the time I got there.

I was as I said, also big. I wasn't ready for Ripley's or any sort of world record, but was definitely large for a Pom. I like the idea of the Victorian Pom, though you will never find this name in the American or Canadian kennel club breed standards, at least not for now. Breeders who like us a decent size, or have the odd genetic throwback to dogs the size that Queen Victoria favoured when she popularized the breed in England, gave us this name.

It was probably just as well that I weighed in at over 17 pounds, or I might not have survived my first ordeal. Luckily, despite my being severely oversized for a regulation Pom, I was exceptionally handsome. You are probably thinking, "My, he does go on," or that all dogs are gorgeous. I agree with the latter, but I really did have

that extra something. That was until I lost many of my teeth, and ripped my ear, but again, that's for later.

As for a Pomeranian's health, life expectancy is 12 to 15 years. Of course, some live longer, and others develop illnesses that take them sooner. Most breeds are prone to certain problems, but for the Pom there are not many. Luckily, I missed out of the condition that affects primarily males, in which hair loss is accompanied by a darkening of the skin. Sounds a bit like male pattern baldness in humans, doesn't it? I did develop a collapsed trachea, a somewhat common problem for the breed; the airways become constricted, causing breathing difficulties noted by a honking or wheezing cough, which is accentuated by excitement, extreme heat, and heavy exercise. Tooth decay can also be prevalent, and I was certainly true to my breed on this one.

Sometimes I wonder about my early days. Was I the pampered Pom of an older lady who died or went into care, whose children did not care enough to find me a good home? Did I live with a family that had a child who became allergic to my long golden fur? That's unlikely, because a good family would have found a home for me, or returned me to the breeder, as most contracts with reputable breeders require. This makes me think I did come from a puppy mill and was sold through a pet shop, and not through a reputable breeder who would have taken me back. Did I simply get lost? Then where was my tag and collar? Why didn't I have a microchip? Why didn't

anyone claim me? Perhaps I was in a cruel home and one day just managed to escape. I simply cannot remember.

What I do remember was those early days on the streets of Cheektowaga. Those days or weeks seemed to go on forever. I just remember being cold, hungry, tired, and scared. Being picked up as a stray is not the most salubrious beginning to one's career. It was kind of unusual, too, for a young, handsome, and supposedly purebred dog. Well, at least it was for a Pom. I met quite a number of what looked like purebred hounds, mostly beagles, whose cage notices like mine, said "Stray."

All anyone knows for sure is that, despite my supposed purebred background, I was found as a stray in 2002. What exactly happened before that will remain a mystery forever, and probably just as well. I certainly had some "emotional baggage" from that period, but with enough love, I was young enough to get over it. I ended up at the Second Chance Rescue, and that is where my story really begins.



# My First Real Home

Marie and Tony Colicchia were an Italian-American couple from Buffalo, New York. They married in 1958 full of a life of promise together. Tony worked as a civil servant and Marie first as a long distance operator and then as a nurse's aid. Devout Catholics with a firm rooting in traditional Italian values, they could hardly wait to start a family. They tried and tried, and finally realized that they simply could not conceive. It took a long time to accept and even longer to consider the alternatives, but finally by the late 1960s they had decided to adopt. Since they were not getting younger at this point, soon after their first son joined them, they were offered his half-brother and jumped at the chance. They had a ready-made family with Mark and Patrick.

The boys grew up in a home full of love, and Mark did fine getting through school, becoming a musician. He did not enjoy school teaching as his "day job," so took an

administrative job in a not-for-profit organization, getting married and raising a stepdaughter, Devon, with his wife Cathy.

The world was a more difficult place for Patrick. A big, nice-looking guy, he was friendly and kind, but could have trouble controlling his frustrations and anger with a world he could never completely understand. Patrick's mental health issues meant he could never learn to drive, hold a permanent job, or even be comfortable leaving home. While Marie kept hoping his life could turn a corner, he was her son, and she always loved him and would look after him for as long as he needed.

Marie loved animals, all of them. She never met a dog or a cat she did not want to take home to love, but sometimes the menagerie could be a bit overwhelming for friends and family, with the most at one point in the house (including me) being six dogs and three cats. Luckily none of us was particularly large.

Patrick had said for some time that he wanted his own dog. Marie was devoted to smaller dogs, some fairly common, some as esoteric as the Chinese Crested. Her favourite seemed to be Pomeranians, so it was no surprise that, when she and Patrick started to look for a dog for him, they would gravitate towards a Pom. They first found an American Eskimo. The dog was not healthy and given a limited time to live, but they wanted her anyway. A few months later, the shelter called and asked if they would be interested in another dog for Patrick,

knowing that the loss of the first would create a void. Since Patrick was a big and masculine guy, his Pom would have to be the same. That's where I came in.

When I arrived at the Second Chance, I was confused and very, very lonely. I was never really excited by the company of other dogs, and while I must admit that I did participate in the incessant barking, I was not having a good time. Marie and a friend, Carol, came to see me, fell for me right away, and took me home. Then I met Patrick. I just knew that, like me, while everything looked all right on the surface, he had found the world a difficult place at times.

"Patrick," an anxious Marie exclaimed, "the poor mite doesn't even have a name. What will you name him?" After some thought, it was clear to Patrick. "His name is Biscuit, but I'll call him Bisky." And so it was, from then on, for the rest of my tumultuous yet wonderful life.

Getting used to my new home was not always easy. Patrick could be impetuous and sometimes inconsistent, which is hard for a dog. Then there were all the other pets in the household, all with their own needs and personalities. Marie was also slowly losing the love of her life, Tony, who developed Parkinson's disease at a relatively young age. While people generally think of Parkinson's as the disease that causes loss of muscular control, later it can also be extremely taxing on the sufferer's mental abilities, much like Alzheimer's.

I had been through a lot, and there was a constant struggle between my own innate good nature, some of the less laudable Pomeranian traits, and survival techniques I had picked up either where I first lived, while on the streets, or at the shelter. I could be difficult - stubborn, and at times, if I felt threatened or scared, downright nasty. Once when I felt especially vulnerable, I sank my teeth into a visitor to the house, who was probably innocent. This incident would come back to haunt me later.

The Colicchias loved me, and worked with me to get over my issues of fear and aggression, which psychologists know in dogs are usually one and the same. Slowly over time, with some help from Marie, Patrick worked with me on the basics of obedience. I learned that it is actually much more fun to walk calmly alongside the master one loves than to pull and dart at all angles.

We would walk forever. This was one of the best memories of my time with Patrick. It was never just "walking the dog." These were some of our best times together and calming for both of us. I gave Patrick a sense of responsibility, as he knew I was his to look after, and he gave me love. They say a dog gives unconditional love, which I did, and so did he. We would walk for ages, covering miles. Patrick would share all his thoughts and concerns with me. Why he found the world such a difficult place I never really understood. I just listened, and walked, it was just so good to be with him.

Did he really train me to walk alongside at perfect heel position, or did I just get so used to our long walks that the natural place to be was on his left side, with my head just a bit beyond his knee? If it was training, it didn't feel like it. This was one of Patrick's greatest gifts to me - everyone, even years later, would comment, "Look how beautifully that dog walks - you wouldn't even know he has a leash on." This became a major advantage later at competitive obedience trials, which I never imagined in those early days.

My favourite game was chasing a light. Patrick would move a flashlight that had a thin sharp light, and I would chase it relentlessly. The fact that I never actually caught anything never really bothered me, and it gave me exercise and kept Patrick amused too.

Patrick and I were truly best buds. I would wait for him by the door to come home, and bark excitedly when I saw him coming on his bike. I never lost my fascination for people on bikes - did I think everyone coming along was Patrick coming back to me, or was I just fascinated by the movement? That's one of those things about which we can hypothesize, but will never know for sure.

Food, movies, and sports played an important part in our idyllic lives together. Unfortunately, the only thing we were active participants in was the first of the list. Patrick loved junk nibbles, and so did I. While he would never willingly do anything to harm me, some of our Saturday

afternoon treats may have led to my significant tooth decay, which in turn led to other health problems.

I was an exceptionally clean dog. Patrick gave me my first bath in August 2003. I needed a bath and to be groomed about once a year, and even then, just to be on the safe side. Of course I relished regular brushings, as most dogs do, especially long-haired ones. I had an amazing ability to appear to not shed. I hardly left a stray hair anywhere, but at the same time could fill the canister of any really strong vacuum with hair deposited deep in carpets and furniture in only one or two rooms.

If only this perfect life could have gone on forever. But life does not always go the way we want, as I had learned before and would be reminded of again. My breath went far beyond “doggy breath” and I had to have several teeth removed, including one of the two that makes a dog a dog. Yes, I lost one of my two lower canine teeth. Around this time, I started coughing. It was not just the “reverse sneeze” that afflicts many Pomeranians. It was the result of a heart murmur. “Nothing major to worry about at this point,” was the verdict of the vet.

Heart murmur is a cardiac problem resulting from turbulence in blood flow. Often it goes away as the dog grows, or it can get worse, requiring medication or even surgery. Was I a young dog with a congenital benign murmur who would outgrow it, since the increased cardiac output during rapid growth can exacerbate the symptoms? Or was I already a developed dog with an

acquired murmur that could lead to more serious issues? Unfortunately, it eventually proved to be the latter.

Finally Marie could not manage to look after Tony at home as his Parkinson's advanced, Patrick with his needs, and all the rest of us. Our house was full of love, hope, and faith, but times were often tough for Marie, a truly wonderful woman. We coped and had as good a time as possible.



***Mardi Gras at the Colicchias'***

## Nothing Good Lasts Forever

The blackest day of my life came on Valentine's Day, 2006. Patrick seemed more uncomfortable than usual for awhile, and then he blacked out. I remember the commotion, I remember the ambulance, I remember the family coming over, and I remember the next few days, with Marie trying her best to be cheerful for the dogs. Most of all, I remember that I never saw Patrick again. He died on February 22, 2006, of a massive stroke at the age of 35.



*Patrick and me*

Of course, I really didn't understand. All I knew was that my saviour, the love of my life, had left me. He was here, then suddenly he was gone, and he did not take me with him. I watched for his bicycle for ages, but of course he never came back. This was not the way things were supposed to be. In the story of the Rainbow Bridge it is always the pet that dies first and is restored to health, playing in a field this side of heaven. It is the pet who one day sees his master approach and they are reunited forever. The master is not supposed to die first, especially not one so young.

Naturally, Marie was heartbroken. Why had she had so many bad breaks? Why did this amazing woman who was so full of love and faith keep getting one challenge heaped on another? And it wasn't over yet, as we soon learned.

For the next few months, we all managed as well as we could. The presence of the other dogs and their needs gave Marie something to focus on. I couldn't help feeling that I was both a comfort and yet a constant reminder of her sorrows, for while I was a family dog, I was very much Patrick's dog. Every time she looked at me, brushed me, fed me, or walked me, she was reminded of how much she missed him, and how many sad turns her life had taken. She did the best she could, and we got on as well as we could. It couldn't have been easy for her, watching me look for him to come home every day, barking at every bike I saw go past our house, thinking it might be

him coming back. I was sad, and sadness, yet at the same time love, permeated our house.

But even this was not to last. Marie, though still a relatively young woman in her late 60's was not healthy. All of life's tragedies must have taken their toll, or perhaps it was just the bad luck that seemed to plague our family. Just over a year after our beloved Patrick died, Marie was hospitalized and I was alone again. Sure, the other dogs were there, but I was never really a "dog's dog," anyway. We got on fine, but being with dogs was not my destiny. After all, I wasn't a beagle or any sort of hunting hound used to living in packs. I was a Pomeranian, evolved from farm working dogs, but really bred to do nothing in particular but be a companion to humans.

Marie was supposed to be out within a couple of weeks, so Mark and Cathy would take care of the canine menagerie at the house, with help from Marie's wonderful neighbour and friend, Rosemary. It is said that dogs live only in the moment, and do not have a real conception of time. I don't think this is true, as I began to wonder what a couple of weeks meant, when Marie's absence seemed to go on forever. All of us were getting really bored and terribly lonely. Mark and Cathy never let us go hungry or without water, but their visits seemed quicker, the walks shorter, the time alone longer and longer. As a long-haired dog, I needed regular, almost daily brushing, and I was not getting it. Still missing

Patrick, I longed for Marie to come back to look after us all and to provide the human companionship I craved so much.

Then, after several months of this fairly basic level of living, the unthinkable happened. Marie could not come home. Her health was such that the only solution was an assisted living facility. Determined that she would come back one day, the dogs all went to a boarding kennel. Eventually everyone, including Marie, realized that she could never come back to the house. Bit by bit, the other dogs started to disappear. I wondered if they were really lucky and Mark and Cathy were taking them home, or to Marie. But they seemed to go with nice strangers, not the family. Finally, it was down to me as the sole remaining Colicchia dog, a responsibility I did not need or want. I was so lonely, and just longed to be loved and held as I had been.

One day, Cathy came and got me. I thought, "Finally, it's my chance, I'm going to Mark and Cathy's house." Since I loved car rides, I could hardly wait. We arrived at the local SPCA, went in, and were seen fairly quickly. I really had no idea what was going on, but Cathy had to answer a lot of questions, things like "How old is he?" (About seven at the time.) "Has he ever bitten anyone?" (We don't like to talk about it, but unfortunately Cathy could not lie to save her life, or mine for that matter.) "I'm sorry Mrs. Colicchia, but at his age with his history and health, our policy and overcrowding leave us no choice but to

euthanize your dog if you surrender him to us.” That was the edict of a compassionate yet no-nonsense intake worker. I guess I didn’t have time to take it all in. All I remember is Cathy crying, and between the tears saying “We can’t do this to Patrick’s dog,” picking me up and walking out.

When we got back to Marie’s empty house in Kenmore, I realized that I was not going to live with Mark and Cathy. I could not really blame them, as they had full and busy lives and a very large young dog who needed to be the centre of attention. I just would not have fit in. So, after a few days, and many phone calls by Cathy, the next stop would be an animal shelter that would try to place me.

I thought that was better than the alternative the SPCA offered and, trying to be positive, remembered that I had been through this before and survived, and was quickly adopted by Patrick. What I had not considered was that it had been six or seven years before. Although with Patrick and Marie’s love, my disposition had evolved to be gentle and docile, I was now a senior dog with several teeth missing, and an intermittent bad cough that had something to do with my heart. The lack of regular grooming had taken a toll on my otherwise handsome coat, too.

So there I was, with limited chance of adoption, my only real stimulation being mealtimes and a few very rushed walks. No one from the past came to visit me. What had I done to be so forgotten and forlorn? Why had Patrick left

me, and then Marie too? For that matter, what happened to my owners before the Colicchias saved me? Maybe it would be better if I were “euthanized” after all, because I was only breathing, eating, and drinking, not living. However, the desire for survival and the spirit of hope seems deeply imbedded in most living creatures, so even at my lowest ebb, I kept hoping and wishing that something good would happen in my life again, though after what I had been through, I really could not think what that could be.



## Perhaps Another Chance

Finally, by the time I had just about given up hope completely, something amazing happened. I'm not sure who called, but my saviours arrived in the form of the self-described "crazy dog ladies." It was Pomeranian and Small Breed Rescue, to the rescue!

Pomeranian and Small Breed Rescue is based in Ontario, serving the Niagara Peninsula and anywhere within a three-hour drive of Hamilton. This makes the group's reach fairly much across southwestern Ontario. Rescues are often performed in the Niagara Falls and Buffalo area. The group has even done "dog runs" as far as New Orleans, after the devastation there. PSBR is a Canadian registered charity, "Devoted to saving small dogs, both mixed and purebreds, from shelters, pounds, and puppy mills." Its mission is "To be the bridge between you and the lovable but unloved dog that needs you." PSRB was just what I needed. Of course, I was not unloved, but

Marie could not care for me, and I was about at the last-chance stage for a home.

All living creatures react differently to stress. Many abandoned dogs become nervous, shy, or aggressive. Pomeranians are no exception, and as I have said, sometimes have the bad rap of being yappy, stubborn, and bad-tempered. Luckily, when Patrick and Marie adopted me, I learned these were not the character traits that were my basic nature. By the time that PSRB took me, all I wanted was to love and be loved, and to have human attention. The “crazy dog ladies” were amazing. They made me feel special and wanted, and I returned the favour by being gentle and inquisitive.

One of the great things about PSRB is that it is a “virtual organization.” It finds homes through the operation of a great website, but the most important thing from a dog’s perspective is that there is no shelter! All dogs are placed in foster homes, where they are assessed for temperament, for example whether they are good with children and other animals, the amount of exercise they need, and so on. The foster families also take their charges to their own veterinarians to assess their health, and if there are health problems, to make sure they are well on their way to recovery before looking for potential adoption.

I was so lucky. After being picked up at the shelter, I was assigned to Laurie and Paul Gallina in Guelph, Ontario. I arrived at their place on October 14, 2007, becoming

their sixth foster dog. They lived in a bungalow on a nice lot with a fenced-in yard along with two Pomeranians, Petey and Tuffy, several cats (more on them later), and their older daughter, who would drop in and out. The love in that home was so strong one could almost taste it. Of course I took to them all, but to Laurie especially, who was the main caregiver.

When I got there, I was a mess. I had lacked proper exercise, the food I had been picking at was adequate but uninspiring, so I had lost weight, and my coat was dull and a bit matted. My cough was more noticeable, and occasionally I found myself gasping for air. Fairly soon I was off to the Gallinas' veterinarian - not once, but several times. There were many tests that I took to in my usual calm manner (hey, who cared if there was the odd jab or strange instrument, it was all human attention!). At this point I was diagnosed with Mitral Valve Disease.

Essentially, the mitral valve prevents blood from flowing backwards as it is pumped through the heart. This valve may simply wear under pressure, and often follows a heart murmur, which I was diagnosed with when I was younger. Apparently, this condition is not uncommon in smaller breed dogs, though not a predisposition for Pomeranians. It will eventually result in heart failure, within a few months to several years. The condition affects about one third of dogs over ten years of age, but of course can start earlier, as it did in my case. As the disease progresses, a dog may become intolerant of

exercise, the respiratory rate increases, and finally fluid develops on the lungs and coughing and laboured breathing develop. In my case, determining whether my coughing was a result of my collapsed trachea or my heart disease, or both, became at first an issue, then more of an academic exercise.

Well, this was great news. Just when I had found this wonderful foster family that was helping put me back together, we ended up finding I was much more ill than we thought. I started my daily dosage of Fortekor, the drug that would keep me alive. My teeth were also getting worse, but there was only so much that PSRB could afford to correct after I arrived. The adoption fees and the donations the group receives come nowhere near to covering the health costs of so many of us rescue dogs. The foster families, in addition to providing love and nurture, often spend considerable sums of their own money on our health care needs to get us to the point that we can be adopted.

Laurie loved me and kept telling me that I was the gentlest Pomeranian she had ever met. She would tell me that she wished she could keep me, but then that would basically defeat the work she was trying to do - she could hardly adopt every dog she fostered!



### *Laurie and me*

That time was idyllic. We'd go for walks, and of course I was always a great walker in a natural heel position. Laurie and Paul bought me a fabulous harness that we could use for walking, but was really meant as a seat belt for car rides. I loved it and could almost put it on myself. If only I had possessed an opposable thumb! While I was never really a "dog's dog," I was used to having dogs around, and really enjoyed Petey and Tuffy. They were regular-sized Poms, and I looked like a giant compared to them. We ran and played in the yard, and often Paul's and Laurie's main job was to act as doorman opening and closing the sliding door off the dining area about as

frequently as an old-fashioned elevator operator. Laurie was home most of the time, so we dogs were rarely alone, but could manage fine if we had to.

One fairly common dog-like characteristic I had was my fascination for cats. I never had any intention of hurting them and never considered them to be prey. After all, there are cats that weigh a lot more than I do! The Gallinas' cats were no exception. I kept trying to play with them, and they kept tantalizing me by showing just the slightest interest, then doing the usual aloof and nervous thing that cats do.

One fateful day, Laurie and Paul were out. The cats were hovering around, and finally I got close enough to them to really check them out. That proved to be a fateful mistake. A Pomeranian's ear can be his Achilles heel, if you will pardon the mixed metaphor. If I had been a Basset Hound, with those huge thick floppy things for ears, I would have come through unscathed. Actually, if I had been a Basset Hound, I probably would not have had the speed or energy to investigate in the first place.

A Pomeranian's ears are not dissimilar to those of my attackers. They are erect, come to a point, and are definitely expressive. If things are interesting, they move slightly closer together, making them look even more pointed. As a Spitz breed of dog, Poms can be difficult to pose for photograph - a strong "Stay" command, often needed for photos, means deep concentration, and our

ears go flat against our heads, not our most attractive pose. You'll notice this in some of my photos.

By the time Laurie and Paul got home, I was cowering in a corner of the kitchen, blood everywhere. I have never been in favour of any sort of mutilation, be it a docked tail, docked ears, or in the case of cats, the removal of front claws. That day I thought otherwise. One of the cats had taken a great swipe at me and ripped through the top half inch of the left side of my left ear.

There was lots of drama, lots of screaming on my part, lots of hugging and something nasty and stinging put on my ear, but no vet trip and no stitches. Everything healed just fine, but I was left with a split in my ear that I thought gave me a sort of a rugged quality, a bit like a dueling scar.

Soon after my arrival at the Gallinas', it was time for my posting on the PSBR website. This was a bit like Lavalife for dogs. A photo was taken of me looking as cute as possible, accompanied by an honest but positive description of me, after the assessment that Laurie and her colleagues did. Well, it could only be a matter of a days before someone came along who would see how wonderful I was, wanting to adopt me and take me to my forever home. I had no worries - PSBR had a rigorous screening process, and the group would only let me go to a home that would be good for me. Anyway, I was in no hurry, as life with the Gallinas was great, and compared

to a shelter, it was paradise. I was even getting used to the idea of becoming a Canadian.

It was just as well that I was in no hurry, for wait we did. There were calls, all of which Laurie handled patiently and honestly, but no matter how cute someone thought I looked, the combination of my age and health always meant that prospective adopters thought they should keep looking.

While Marie could no longer care for me, she never stopped caring about me, and was in regular contact with Laurie by e-mail. After about three months, Laurie realized that my chances of adoption were very slim and talked to Paul about keeping me. "Well of course we can keep him, but if you want to keep the dogs we foster, we'll have to stop fostering, because we won't have room for any more," the wiser and less emotional Paul stated. When Laurie informed Marie, she was delighted that I would finally have a home.

However, as life is never predictable, just before I was taken off the market so to speak - in other words while my listing on the PSBR was still active - Laurie was faced with an ethical and practical dilemma. The initial screeners at PSBR told her to expect a call from a man who had a lot of experience with dogs and was interested in me, despite the risks! While she would have kept me, she could hardly be a good rescue worker if she adopted me herself knowing someone else was interested. After

all, if she found me a good home, she could go on with her life-saving work.

While I described the PSBR system as a bit like Lavalife, it is far more rigorous, at least before one gets a “coffee date.” The website clearly explains the group’s role and mandate, and has a gallery of dogs looking for homes, each with a photo and full and honest description. There is no phone number, and prospective adopters have to fill out a long on-line questionnaire about their homes, lives, experience with dogs, and provide personal and veterinarian references. Then they pick two dogs they might be interested in. The end of the form is quite clear - do not try to find a way to contact PSBR by phone, and someone will be in touch in up to two weeks, so be patient.

One Friday in January 2008, my soon to become Alpha Dad was looking at websites trying to find a small dog to adopt. He doesn’t remember how he actually found the PSRB site, but he completed the questionnaire, and picked me and a Poodle as dogs he was interested in. The Poodle, because he knew Poodles were a smart breed, me because he had first wanted a Pomeranian in 1965, and because he liked my picture and my name. Hey, I said it was like Lavalife, didn’t I?

It may have been a slow night at PSBR, or the screener was especially taken with his answers, particularly about how he always had older dogs, had taken two through multiple obedience titles, and had been a trainer at his

dog club, North York Obedience. By 10:30 the next morning he had a call telling him that his references had been checked, and asking when a home visit could be arranged.

The PSRB screener, knowing that he could handle dogs and knowing that I could stay indefinitely at the Gallinas', tried to steer him towards the Poodle, who had some significant behavioral problems, but he insisted he wanted to talk to both foster homes.

It was January 14, 2008, and Laurie spent ages on the phone with a man calling from a hotel in Parry Sound, where he was staying for a business meeting. They were talking about me!! It was all arranged that there would be a visit following the PSRB home visit to my new potential family.

On Saturday, January 26, at about 11:00 in the morning, a Volvo station wagon pulled up, and two comfortable looking middle-aged men got out. I was in the yard, and ran over to the fence and started barking. "That's him, the big one. Hi Biscuit! Let's go up to the door," were the first words I heard from the one who would become Alpha Dad.

We all met inside - Laurey and Paul, Petey and Tuffy, me, Daryl (Alpha Dad), and Brian (Nurturing Dad). I was lovely, they were lovely, and they certainly knew how to make a dog feel good about himself. We played and the humans chatted, and after about 45 minutes, it was a "done deal," as the expression goes. They had picked

me!!! I was going to have a forever home, and it was not by default - someone had actually picked me!

A week later, on February 2, they arrived in the early evening. They brought a present for Laurie and Paul, and as they were getting my things ready, including an old towel that Laurie and Paul rubbed against their skin, everyone cried. I really didn't know why, I was just happy to get my seat belt on for a car ride!

## My Predecessors

To understand the relationship that developed with my new dads, one has to know something about their relationships with the pets who came before.

As a child, Brian's family lived in what was then semi-rural Niagara-on-the-Lake, when even parts of the old town were virtual country. It may seem strange now, but in the 1950's it was not unusual in town to keep chickens or goats. Brian's step-father raised chickens, some of which won multiple prizes at livestock shows. However, it was not the chickens that made an impression on Brian, but Bambino, the family's Cocker Spaniel. She had no training, lived outside a lot, and basically looked after herself.

Daryl grew up, as many boys do, desperate for a dog. In fact, the breed he really wanted was a Pomeranian. His parents did get a dog, an Irish Setter cross, but neither parent had the interest or personal maturity to care for a

dog, and Daryl at ten was just too young to really know what to do without guidance. The dog lasted only a year, and was replaced by a cat who needed far less attention.

When Daryl and Brian met, they got a cat, a mad animal from a mentally unstable priest. After five weeks, the cat ran out in front of the only car that went down their quiet street that day and was killed.

If you are thinking, "These guys would be useless with other animals," don't judge too early, as things did improve. After tropical fish, next came two cats, both gifts from people looking for homes for them. Tasha lived to fifteen years of age when she developed cancer and Cleo to almost nineteen. Years later, they also cared for Brian's mother's cat, a large beige creature both in colouring and personality.

Sometime in 1979 Daryl said that he wanted a dog. Brian asked why, to which Daryl replied, "Because I don't feel fulfilled," a definite take-off on the contention that couples without children look at their dogs and cats as child substitutes. "What kind do you want? Wait, I know, the kind that needs to be walked and fed," was Brian's response.

When they moved to England in 1980 on a year's exchange with a family, the husband of which took Brian's job and Brian his, they took on the family Beagle, Scamp, whose name only told part of the story. He was seven, and basically did what he wanted, and obeyed only Daryl. Once he did obey Barbara Woodhouse, the

famous English dog trainer. Her program was on television and Daryl was watching it. As Scamp was walking through the room past the television, Mrs. Woodhouse, demonstrating one of her commands in her piercing voice, called out "Sit," and Scamp did, right in front of the television. That was about the extent of his obedience work, though like me, he did walk in perfect "heel" position.

A number of humans in their fifties and older often reminisce about how much more casual life used to be. You must have heard people talk about how when they were young they would disappear for hours on their bicycles, and no one worried that they had been abducted by child molesters. Good people reacted to their dogs in a similar way. They didn't love them any less, they just didn't feel quite today's level of monitoring was so important. Living on the edge of rugged country in the Midlands, it was not of major concern if Scamp got the scent of something interesting, took off, and was gone for two days. He would always return, eat a lot, and then sleep for a couple more days.

Much as they loved Scamp, he was not their dog. When Scamp's family returned from Canada and Daryl and Brian were still there, he was a confused dog. The first night he slept on Daryl's suitcase, the second night he slept on his original master's suitcase. The evening before Daryl and Brian were to leave to return to Canada, Scamp first sat next to Daryl, then moved to his "real" dad, and

looked at Daryl soulfully, as if to say, "We had a great time, but this is where I belong." Years later when Daryl and Brian visited a few months before Scamp died, again Scamp came in to their room at night and slept on their suitcase. Descartes was dead wrong. Dogs do have feelings, and they have memories.

In 1982 it was time for the first dog of their own. They considered various breeds, and one of Brian's colleagues, along with their good friends Vivien and John Parkhill, suggested their favourite breed, a Keeshond. Casey was six months old, available because his first owner bought him from a pet store on a whim, and soon realized that her life was busy enough with two Yorkies. As a Keeshond, Casey was a Spitz, closely linked to Pomeranians. Casey lived to a decent age of over twelve, succumbing to cancer.

The human mind works in mysterious ways. My dad's never called the next dogs Casey by accident or through force of habit. Sixteen years later, when I arrived, I was often called Casey by mistake, because our breeds were so similar. Even though he was about three times my size and a different colour, his shape was identical to mine, and we shared many similar mannerisms, which must have come from our Spitz roots.

In 1994, six months after Casey died, came Mandy. Daryl had his heart set on a Bichon Frise, after he learned that the dog who lived around the corner and looked like a Poodle on steroids was in fact a Bichon. Mandy came

from a breeder, but was two years old, with complications from giving birth, so could not breed again. When they went to see her, the breeder said, "She may not be interested and will want to get back to her puppies." Mandy took one look at Daryl, jumped in his lap and stayed there until the breeder finally pried her away. It was as if they both knew it was destiny.

Mandy was definitely Daryl's dog, and was the one who got him addicted to obedience work, which I will tell you more about later. In late 1995 they decided that, since Mandy was small and perfect, perhaps another Bichon in the house would be a good idea. They went to the breeder where Mandy was born to find a good mate for her. Amy, a retired breeding dog at four, joined the household.

Amy was a more reserved and worried dog than Mandy, who thought the world was a wonderful place and assumed that everyone loved her. Mandy was the "tail up" dog, and Amy was the "tail down" dog, the "glass half empty" dog. Amy would have been very hard to housebreak and to train to trust and love humans, had it not been for Mandy. Mandy basically trained her to live with a family. Amy thrived and went on to earn obedience titles.

Amy died three weeks short of fifteen in January 2007, after a long illness. Mandy died suddenly less than four months later. She too was just a few weeks shy of fifteen.

My dad's sense of grief was very strong, especially losing two dogs so close together who had been with them for so many years. Well-meaning friends would ask, "Are you going to get another dog?" Finally, at one point, Daryl snapped, "Tell me, if you go to a funeral home visitation do you usually ask the widow standing by her husband's casket if she is planning to marry again?"

However, as we know, time is a great healer, and nine months later it was my time to become an important member of the family.

# My Forever Home

We arrived in Niagara-on-the-Lake after an uneventful ride. On the way, one of my new dads would periodically check on me and give me a quick pat. I was just fine. I think they may have been trying to reassure themselves as much as they were me!

When we got to the house, we went in and they showed me around the rooms on the main floor where we would spend most of our time and showed me where to find my water bowl and food dish. This was very thoughtful, as I had built up a bit of a thirst by this point. I was also glad of something to eat, although food was never a particular doggy obsession for me.

Daryl decided we should mark the occasion by taking a couple of photos of the three of us together, using a timer on the camera. Soon it was time for bed, and they showed me another water bowl in the bathroom off the

master bedroom. Then they invited me up on the bed for a cuddle and, hopefully, a good night's sleep.



### *The three of us*

If you are thinking of getting a dog, I should add a warning here. Do not try this maneuver if introducing a young, dominant, large dog to your home! He will probably think it is his right to be on the bed, perhaps even more than yours. I was an older dog who was already known to be gentle and have good manners, and I was small enough not to be a major hog of a queen-sized bed. Except, of course, the times I decided to stretch out and lie crossways, taking up most of the useable space. While any breed can “try it on”, attempting to take charge, Pomeranians, despite their

relatively small size (even a Victorian will rarely top 18 or 19 pounds), are no exception. However, my dads had a fair bit of experience with dogs, and from the moment we met there was really no question that they were in charge. Daryl was definitely Alpha Dad, and Brian, even as Nurturing Dad, brooked no nonsense if he ever thought I was getting a bit “big for my britches,” or in my case, my pantaloons.

By the next day, we had already started to develop a pattern, which is so important for dogs, especially ones coming in to new environments. Brian would get up and let me out for a quick pee; then we’d take a cup of tea up to Daryl, who would take me for a proper morning walk shortly after.

While I was feeling a bit confused about yet another change in my life, I acted as if this is where I was meant to be. And of course, it was. Some things took time to get used to. Being the only animal in the house was different for me, and it had its pros and cons. It was great not to have to share my dads’ attention, but it was deadly lonely when they went out. The hardest thing to get used to was the sheer space, both inside and outside. In my previous homes I had not been used to finding rooms that were closed and rarely used except for parties and guests to stay over. When they started to take me out on the terrace, for days I wouldn’t go off the steps - the back garden was just too deep, and the vineyard behind was endless.

Of course, old dogs can learn new tricks, and the secret to teaching a dog anything is to do it in small increments. Fairly soon I learned to love the garden, and loved checking on guests when they were in the seldom used rooms.

My dads knew I would have trouble being on my own, so they introduced this as slowly and as gently as they could. It did not go well. I was too old to be destructive, and too well-mannered to do any ablutions in the house. I just frantically ran from room to room, window to window, barking all the time, trying to find them and encouraging them to come back.

Enter the crate, my life nemesis. There are many theories on whether or not to use a crate, probably as many as there are dogs and caregivers. Those who are philosophically against the crate probably never tried to housebreak a puppy, care for an ill dog, or readjust a rescue dog and actually get to sleep soundly or get out of the house from time to time. Once, an acquaintance told Daryl that she had to give up a purebred puppy because she could not housebreak it. When he asked why she did not use a crate, she replied that she couldn't do that, because it would have been cruel. Not as cruel as sending a dog back, methinks!

Crate advocates will also talk of the benefit from the dog's point of view. While crated, the dog is definitely safe from all forms of harm and will often come to see the crate as a place of refuge. One of their last dogs, Amy,

the Bichon Frise, was a nervous and suspicious girl, and would often go into her crate to get away from visitors. If someone particularly annoyed her, she would even grab the door with her paw and shut it behind herself! Mandy, the other Bichon had a much more gregarious personality, but nevertheless enjoyed her crate too. Years ago, Daryl was explaining the glories of the crate as "home" to one of his colleagues, who then asked, "Well, does Mandy's crate have a name?" Daryl replied, in what he considered to be a moment of genius of literary allusion, "Of course. Her home is named Manderly."

So, I could understand the crate idea at an intellectual level (I know I am getting carried away here - after all I am only a dog), but I really had trouble accepting it at an emotional level, despite the fact that virtually all working dogs and all show dogs have crates and are used to them. I could understand that the crate was intended as a safe place to keep me calm. My dads knew that for a rescue dog "separation anxiety" - i.e., being terrified of being parted from one's saviour(s), even for a short time - was going to take a long time for me to get over. Sadly, this is a real problem for rescue dogs. We often need to be crated for our own protection and the sanity of our owners, yet for those of us who have spent months in puppy mills or shelters, the distinction between household crate and puppy mill or shelter cage is blurred.

It has been said that dogs all need places of their own, and since I definitely did not think of my crate as a place

of calm and refuge, Daryl, bless him, got me a traditional comfy dog bed, which they placed in the kitchen. I did go into it a few times just to be polite and appear grateful, but honestly I couldn't have cared less. All I cared about was being close to Brian, and I would have slept on a cold concrete floor if it was next to him.

Another fallacy about dogs, their nature and needs, is that all dogs love to play catch. I had absolutely no interest in going after balls, and neither did any of the dogs who came before me in Daryl's and Brian's lives. However, right from the outset, I did love my stuffed toy bear. After a good evening meal, I would invariably find my toy, walk around with it in my mouth, and then, well, ahem, hump it on the family room floor. When I was done Brian would always ask me if I wanted to lie back and have a cigarette, which I guess was some kind of joke, as dogs don't smoke. Not because we can't inhale, but because we don't have opposable thumbs to hold the cigarettes.

In those first few days, I started to spend time in the other room that got used a lot, the study. The walls were covered with ribbons, trophies, photos, and awards for other dogs, and there were several ominous-looking small, sealed ceramic jars around the place. This should have been my first clue to what was in store for me, when after only a couple of days, Alpha Dad put my leash on and said, "Biscuit, let's try some TRAINING," and we went down to the basement.

Soon Alpha Dad disappeared, and it was just Nurturing Dad and me. Naps by the family room fire, and extra walks, though short ones, seemed just fine to me. I loved going out in the car with my dad, and one of my favourite things was going to the car wash, where the soap and water would cascade over us, though we were safe and dry inside. Then Alpha Dad was back, and after a few days there was a lot of organizing, and we were off again.

We arrived in Toronto late one Sunday evening, by which point I was so jaded by change, I thought, "So what?" When we arrived at a huge apartment building downtown, I was told this was going to be my other home. At least the apartment was manageable - even I could get oriented to four rooms without much trouble. I must say, I rather did take to the parkette, and all the small dogs I met over the next few days.

After a few days, more change. It seemed that Brian, although retired, had just accepted a long-term contract until the end of June. Enter Uncle Bill, a neighbour in the building who had looked after Amy and Mandy at lunchtime during the week. He was a lovely guy whose Westie had died a couple of years previously; no new dog had come along, he spent at least 45 minutes to an hour with me every day. We walked, talked, came back for lunch and a rub, and it was great.

After a couple of days, Bill begged my dads to leave me out of the crate, as I was so miserable going back in when it was time for him to leave. They had already tried letting

me have the run of the apartment, thinking that since it was relatively small and too high up to spot movement on the ground, that I would be okay. But of course, I got frantic, so back to the crate. In response to Bill, Daryl thought if they kept me confined to just the bedroom all would be well, but it wasn't long before I learned to climb the child gate, and then run around the other rooms. So it was back to the crate, for a few short hours a day.

I have to admit that over the ensuing weeks and months, I did come to realize that I was not being abandoned forever, and that in fact one or both of my dads would soon be home with me. This was good for my mental well-being, but it didn't do anything to deal with my need to have them there all the time. Actually, though Daryl was great and I loved him being around, I really wanted Brian there all the time, and Daryl as much as possible, but it wasn't as critical.

Just before Brian started working, we walked to the ManuLife Centre, one place in Toronto where dogs are not barred from the shopping mall, and are often seen with their people at the interior sidewalk cafés having morning lattes. (Only the humans - it may be an up-market mall, but not completely over the top.) It probably only allows dogs because many of the residents in the attached expensive apartment block demand it.



### ***With Nurturing Dad***

"That's a very intelligent looking dog you have there," a confident and well-dressed older man said to Brian. "But watch him, or he will learn how to control you, and not the other way around." Notwithstanding what I said earlier about knowing that I was not the boss right from the beginning, I did not take kindly to some nosey stranger reminding Nurturing Dad of the possibility of my being manipulative. Sure enough, when the story was reported to Alpha Dad, he felt compelled to increase our training sessions, just for good measure.

Soon after I arrived, I met my new vets, Jim and Angela at the Upper Canada Animal Hospital in Niagara-on-the-

Lake. They confirmed what we already knew - I was a healthy, good-natured dog, except for major tooth decay and my mitral valve disease. Jim explained that the poison from my bad teeth could actually be exacerbating my heart condition. He advised waiting for a while until I had completely settled in, so it was in early May that Daryl took a day off, and I was under anesthetic. I had seven more teeth removed, and although a dog starts off with 42, I did end up with a rather different smile. To add insult to injury, in a few weeks a large chunk of my remaining lower canine tooth broke off, so I was left with one canine tooth stump. It was a good thing I never planned to look ferocious! I also had a benign growth taken off one of my paws. So in less than three months I had cost my dads over \$2,000 in vet bills, but they said I was completely worth it.

It was at this point that Daryl started his compulsive worrying about my weight. I may have lost half a pound which, granted, is a fairly reasonable percentage of my total weight. I was never exceptionally interested in food, and I could eat a lot without gaining. They gave me three or four meals a day, almost enough for two 17-pound dogs, and I would eat almost all of it, and never gain. Of course, they did have to make it appetizing - no plain kibble for me, and absolutely no tinned muck. One vet friend (theirs, not mine) suggested that it was the variety that gave me periodic diarrhea, which took away any nourishment I was getting. He then went on to say I should be given a bland diet of kibble and I would eat

what I needed to survive. Gee, thanks. With my coughing added to this, Daryl was fairly worried in May 2008. "Please let us have him as long as possible, but please give us at least two years," I heard him pray one day. Well, he did get his wish.

Over those first few months, there was so much to learn about and so much to take in. I loved it all, including meeting all sorts of new people. As the weather improved, I learned to love that big, initially frightening garden, and my dads got a real kick out of getting a long rope out and attaching one end to a tree, the other to my collar, as I would run around or sit in the shade as they gardened or cut grass. Daryl would say it made me look like a "real dog," perhaps on a plantation in Alabama at the turn of the last century. Of course I didn't need a rope because they feared I would run off. To the contrary, it was to keep me away from equipment such as the lawnmower, because if Brian was riding on it, I thought I should too. There were a couple of other reasons, specifically birds and bicycles.

I felt that one of my jobs was to keep the skies above our property free of birds. It worked every time - a bird would fly over, I would chase after it and bark, and then it would realize that it did not belong and would fly away. I could never understand why my dads thought my chasing and barking was a bad thing. After all, dogs learn through positive reinforcement, and since my plan worked 100% of the time, they really should have been pleased. In

fact, though I don't want to appear self-satisfied, my method even worked with larger interlopers into our airspace, including one very noisy helicopter.



### ***Keeping the skies clear on our terrace***

My obsession with bicycles may have been more deeply seated, as I had explained earlier that my previous dad, Patrick, always rode a bike and I barked with joy when he was coming home. Most evenings in Niagara, unless it was bitter cold, my dads would have martinis and Daryl would have his daily two cigarettes on the screened-in porch in the front of the house. Since it was enclosed on three sides and on the protected side of the house, it was almost always a tolerable temperature, at least for a few

minutes. Because of separation anxiety, there was no way they would go out there without me for long, even if I was in a semi-asleep state. While they wished I could be a bit more self-sufficient, this was in many ways one of my charming qualities. It was a regular occurrence that one or more bikes would go by, and even though our house was well set back from the road, I would bark, and one of them would grab me just as I was about to make an attempt to go through the screen to get to the cyclists.

One day, they tried something new. Daryl put me in a pouch-type carrier; then they got on their bikes and we rode down the Niagara Parkway. Even that didn't stop me from barking at bikes we met coming in the other direction. In exasperation, Daryl said, "Biscuit, give it up, you're on a bike yourself." I did realize that I was being a bit of a pain, and tried to calm down, looking forward to my next ride. Unfortunately, I was a bit too heavy to ride in a pouch, but Daryl promised we would find a solution, which he did in Florida the next Christmas.

After a few months, when Brian had finished working and retired for the third or fourth time, he and I were home most of the time, leaving Uncle Bill and the Toronto apartment. The best of this was spending time with Brian, who really did live up to his title of Nurturing Dad. I followed him everywhere. Whichever room he went into, I was there. If he got into the bathroom without me, I would lie in front of the door. If he was having a bath, I always worried that he would drown when he put his

head under to wash his hair, so I kept my front paws on the edge of the tub, just to make sure he re-surfaced. He sometimes referred to me as Daryl's spy, and Daryl referred to me as Brian's assistant.

Of course, if Brian went out while Daryl was home, I would try to follow Daryl. The problem was that he never stayed in one place. I would be exhausted following him up and down stairs, in and out of rooms, and actually I could only relax if I followed him to the basement on a morning he did ironing.

Gardening was fun, because I got to stay outside on the long rope. Pool time was even better. I am not of a breed that has any interest in swimming, but I did love running around the pool enclosure chasing birds. However, they could not leave me there, even for a few minutes - the iron pool fence had bars about four inches apart, and I could flatten my body almost as well as a mouse could, so I was out in no time to see what they were up to. It wasn't really such a Houdini act, as my luxurious fur concealed the fact that wet, I would probably have the body of a Whippet or Greyhound.

When we did go back to the apartment in Toronto again from time to time, I repeated my bird duty on the balcony. It was long and narrow, with a concrete wall that left a gap of about three inches at either end. I would race from end to end, barking at birds and planes, and get to the end to look out. They were always worried that I would get on a chair or the air-conditioning unit and

then make a leap over the edge in pursuit, but I was never dumb enough or obsessed enough to try anything like that!

Life was good indeed. Regular walks and training with Alpha Dad; daily brushings, walks, naps, and almost constant companionship with Nurturing Dad; a great home in the country and a great dog park in the city - what dog could ask for more? I certainly did not, but I did get a lot more!

## An Active Social Life

Alpha Dad is fairly “by the book” about working with dogs, perhaps the result of his parents being complete devotees of Dr. Spock in the 1950s. However, my dads ignored the advice about keeping a new dog (i.e., me) in a calm and quiet environment without a lot of travel and without a lot of new people for several weeks. Needless to say, I coped perfectly and we never looked back.

I was taken to my first dinner party just a week after I arrived. My dads had arranged this before my arrival was predicted, so Daryl called his good friend Sherry Sweeney who, being a devoted dog person, was delighted to include me. So off we drove to Kitchener to meet the “big girls.” Sherry is larger than life with enveloping warmth, and has a statuesque presence. Bali, who is a Labradoodle, is as gentle as one would expect from her breed mix, quieter than her mistress, but a welcoming hostess nonetheless. However, she would not be one to

mess with, as her size and look is more like a blonde Irish Wolfhound. I just took it all in, and learned my opening social gambit, which was along the lines of “Hello, my name is Biscuit, I’m a Pomeranian, and really friendly. You can talk to me and pat me.” Worked like a charm, though a bit more difficult at cocktail parties, mostly because humans are awfully tall when they stand up, and often didn’t look down far enough to notice me.

Laurie at PSRB had said that I tended to bark when people came over, but soon I realized that this would be a waste of time and voice at my new dads’ because people were always coming over. Only three weeks after I joined them, we had 20 people for lunch on a Sunday, and I behaved as if I had been with them for years.

With both dads working at the time, there was some careful planning that had to go into looking after me, which extended beyond arranging for Uncle Bill to come in at lunchtimes. In late March of 2008, we were off to another party in the Kitchener area, held by a mutual friend, Tom Walker, to celebrate Sherry’s 50th birthday. We stayed over, and on the Sunday, Alpha Dad and I drove to Hanover to stay in a pet-friendly bed and breakfast, as Daryl had a meeting at the local library the next morning. Out to dinner at some other friends, then the next day I got to go to a meeting! Of course, I could not be left alone anywhere, due to my separation anxiety, though my dad did escape for lunch. Since it was a rainy day, I was safe for an hour in my dreaded crate in the car.

And it was not just my dad's day jobs that had to be accommodated. Soon after I arrived, Daryl's sister, Lee, came from Alberta to go shopping for a rental property in Hamilton. I went along on this search, and often came along to supervise maintenance work on rentals.

Those first few months were great, meeting lots of new people, and a few new dogs, too, although I have to confess that I was always more interested in the people. We had a huge garden wedding that summer for Daryl's niece, and I got to attend the service. Daryl figured out that if he put his hand over my eyes it would stop me from barking at birds during the wedding ceremony. The following year, we had the reception in our garden for the wedding of Brian's niece. I really enjoyed the cocktail time, for I could mingle with all the guests. I had to go in my crate inside for the dinner, but afterwards, the caterer made it up to me by giving me a big plateful of the most tender roast beef I ever had. Life was especially good that day.



***Grandma Nancy, her man Mac, and me***

I had lots of visits to Grandma Nancy's in Burlington for various family events. Nancy is Daryl's stepmother, and my dads always say that out of seven parents between them, she is by far the best. The house was always full of dogs, cats, and tons of humans of all ages. I was really good on visits to Daryl's niece, Elicia, and was always gentle with the baby.

I always had a good time at Tom and Marju Drynan's place. Though really not dog people, they are so

easygoing that they would invite me anyway, even to their amazing newly decorated penthouse in Dundas. I would even get smuggled in to their “no pets” rental in Naples, Florida.

I got to go all over. In Hamilton we visited Daryl’s friends since childhood, the four generation McArthur family, for their riotous Sunday dinners, where I was one of three small dogs. In Niagara, Aldo and Graham made sure I was invited for summer dinners on their terrace, and I went to a pool party at Marg’s on Grand Island. Sally and Stan in Dundas have a neat lab named Simon we would visit, and I had a weekend in the country where Dave and Virginia have horses! That was really cool, although I wasn’t allowed too close to the horses, not sure why, but there probably was a good reason.

The only visit that was not perfect was the time I was invited to go to Ann and Ted Huffman’s house in Welland with other mutual friends and serious dog people, Andy and Randee Loucks. My dads had known them all for several years, and had a less than great visit once in the past when the Huffmans lived in Brussels, and my dads took the Bichons. Perhaps because the Huffman’s dog at the time, Molly, was very old, perhaps it was the strange temperature inversions at the time, whatever. Suffice it to say, that the Bichons decided to pee wherever and whenever. So, another city, years later, and the Huffmans had a new dog, Toby, a Scottish terrier. We had a great time, until I started fussing, and Ann asked if I needed to

go out. Alpha Dad, who normally knows better, thought I could wait, and of course a few minutes later it happened. Diarrhea, next to the crate, was the bane of my existence. Luckily the dining room had hardwood and no rugs, but to this day I think the Huffmans must be really good friends and think my dads always get the worst dogs going.

My favourite people were Clair and Pauline Sullivan. Daryl has known Clair for over forty years, having met at the McArthurs' when they all lived in Hamilton. Clair's first wife, Gail, and Brian were great friends and would walk their dogs together. Gail died suddenly, and Clair married Pauline, who came with a dog, and adopted and cared for Morgan, Gail's Standard Poodle, as if he were her child. We were at their house for dinner just five days before Morgan died. They decided not to get another dog of their own for a while, and looked after a couple of friends like me instead. I would go for visits, and sometimes stay over if my dads were going to be out late. Once, they just left me for the evening, and called on their way home. "Could you wait until tomorrow morning?" Pauline said. "Clair and Biscuit have already gone to bed." Their place was definitely my second home - perhaps I should say, they were my second parents, because twice they came to look after me in Florida.



### *Visiting Marie*

Our most poignant visits were with Marie, Mark, and Cathy in Buffalo. When I left PSRB for my forever home, Laurie gave Daryl Marie's e-mail address. After a couple of weeks, I asked him to write to her for me. I started, "Hi, Grandma, it's me, Bisky. We have both had some bad breaks, so I wanted you to know that I am fine and living in my great forever home in Niagara-on-the-Lake." I went on to talk about my new dads, and what we were doing. Marie is a computer wizard, and replied with photos of me and Patrick, and stories of our lives. That was the beginning of the friendship between the Colicchias and my new dads. The first time we went to visit, Marie was

in an assisted living facility with only a room to herself. I suppose I didn't understand it all, but really wondered why all these people started getting teary-eyed the moment they met. I got tons of hugs, and I think I really did remember them, even though it had been some time and they were out of context. I do remember though, making it quite clear to my Nurturing Dad that he better not have any idea of leaving me behind with my old family at this point. The following year when we visited, Marie was much better, and able to live in a senior's apartment that has a common dining room. She even has a cat named Toby, and could get out to do some volunteer work at the SPCA. There were several pictures of me, one with my Alpha Dad doing obedience work.

It is often said that dogs and children need stimulation, and going places certainly gave it to me. And if you do not take your dogs and children out in public, how will they ever have the chance to learn how they should behave? On the dog front, when we went visiting, I always had a good long walk first. I was always given a bowl of water, and no matter what a host offered, I was never allowed the run of anyone's home, and I was never fed snacks or food at the table. I was never allowed on anyone's furniture unless specifically given permission by the host. And of course we were always entertaining with conversation (my dads), and the odd trick (me), and we never stayed too long.

## Travel Makes a Well Rounded Dog

Most animals are creatures of habit, as are many people. On the other hand some people crave the excitement that comes from change, new experiences, and new places. Most cats hate change, and so do some dogs. However, most dogs enjoy new experiences, as long as they can be with the ones they love, and I was no exception.

Our first real trip was in the summer of 2008, when we drove to New England to visit some of my dad's friends from Florida. I enjoyed our first of many roadside picnics, and by late afternoon the first day, out we arrived at Jim Marshall's house in Woburn, Mass. Not to be confused with the original Woburn in England, they pronounce it "Woooooburn." Then again the New England accent is a thing to behold, if not always to understand. Get a Massachusetts native to say the old line, "I parked my car in the Harvard yard," and you will be lucky to understand a word of it.

Jim lived with his old cat grey tabby cat, Trixie, another rescue. While Jim had heard all about me and was glad to welcome me, Trixie was less than enthusiastic. When I made my overture of greeting, my nicest formal bark, as she lay sleeping on the living room couch, she took one look, gathered herself up, and scurried through the little cat door that led to the basement. No matter how much interest I showed, or how friendly I was, this was always

my experience with cats - well, except for being attacked by the brigands at the Gallinas'. There were some Chihuahuas next door to Jim's, but these dogs seemed really small and silly, running around barking aimlessly, so I wasn't introduced to them. It was fairly hot, and Jim loved it when I would "frog out," as he put it, lying flat on my stomach with my front and back legs out, I guess the way a frog looks.

We had a great two nights, then were off again in convoy to spend time with Jim's parents, Dick and Jean, in a big house on a quiet street in Maine. It was cool, with trees and a large pool to run around and drink from, just like at home. I could hear all sorts of animals in the woods behind the house day and night. Of course, I did have to spend some time in my ever-present crate when they went out to restaurants and other places not welcoming to dogs, but all in all it was great. Jim, Daryl, and I even went for a long walk around the town. I especially enjoyed watching them all dig in to fresh Maine lobster - they were worse than a dog with a bone! There was a cat there too but - you guessed it - I didn't see much of her, either.



### ***The dogs of Rhode Island***

Next we were off to Rhode Island. Another Florida friend, Marie McCutcheon, spends her summers in a cottage just a few hundred yards from the ocean. Marie is welcoming and has an air of graciousness and casual yet sophisticated southern charm that goes back to her roots in Georgia. When we got there, the place was buzzing. Marie's daughter, son-in-law, granddaughter, their cat, and two dogs were staying, too. As usual, not much truck with the cat, but the dogs and I acted as if we had always been friends. One was a black Lab, and the other, Chrissy, was a Pomeranian! The humans would go to the beach, but Marie would stay back with us dogs, and we had great chats and cuddles.

Later that summer, Daryl had to go to a three-day meeting in Sudbury. Since he and his colleagues were staying at a pet-friendly hotel, Brian and I came along. We had a ground-floor room opening onto a large grass courtyard. It was perfect, for as much as I wanted to chase and bark at birds, there was no way I could get lost. Luckily, there were no bicycles there to bark at.

For Canadian Thanksgiving, we were on the road again, this time to visit Jim and David in Philadelphia. Daryl took me on some of the same walks he had taken Mandy and Amy when they had stayed there several times in the past.

My big travel adventure, which took me to yet another family home, was driving to Florida in November with Brian. I didn't understand why we went without Daryl, but as long as I was with Brian, I didn't mind. It was a long drive, but we stopped for lots of walks and pees, and I was really good in the motels we stayed at. My dad tried for pet-friendly motels, but smuggled me in anyway to get better rooms than the ones normally reserved for pets!

Eventually we got to Naples, and I soon learned that I was going to be spending quite a bit of time there. My dad's ground floor apartment was great, as both the front door and the door off the lanai opened directly to the outside, so no elevators or stairs if I needed a quick trip out. Everyone there was really nice to me, and Brian constantly had people over.

The Marshalls, whom I had met in Maine, live directly above my dads. One day my dad had to be out late and Dick, who is a kind and gentle retired doctor, agreed to take me out. All was fine until he tried to get me to go back in my crate. I was having none of it, and tried to nip him. Not that I could really do any damage, with the few teeth I had left, but I was showing my less than stellar quality of trying to take control if I thought anyone had weaker resolve than I. It worked, just as it did with Brian's niece, Tanya, in Niagara and with Brian's friend, Bob, in Toronto. However, Bob was so large, that after our tussle one day, the next time he came I was too scared of him to come out of my crate. I know, I know, you're thinking, "He finally learned to see his crate as a place of refuge." Well, it was only the once, and only for a few minutes.

My dads could never believe that anyone could have any trouble with me, as I always went right into my crate, albeit with a sullen expression and my head held low, if they told me to when they were going out. The key difference, as I explained earlier, was that in their case there was absolutely no doubt as to who was in charge, and it wasn't me. And as it is for most dogs, that made me feel secure and happy.

In early December, Pauline and Clair arrived, and a couple of days later, so did Daryl. A day or two later, my dads were off on a cruise with their friends Tom and Marju, so Pauline and Clair stayed with me and looked after me.

Just before Daryl arrived, there was one embarrassing incident that I hesitate to talk about, but feel I must if you are to really understand all about the dog I was, and all my support systems. While I have always been a finicky eater, more like a cat than a dog, I did enjoy my evening meal. As a conclusion after a good meal, it was my habit to find my stuffed bear, and first carry it around in my mouth, and perhaps play a bit of light hearted catch if one of my dads would throw it. Then, despite being neutered (I prefer “fixed,” as while I was missing important parts, I was still a boy), I would hump my bear for a few minutes, as I explained earlier.

Since this was the only toy I had any interest in, they made sure I had one in each location, so they wouldn’t have to remember to pack it. Pauline had given me a new bear for Florida. Its back legs were sown together at the bottom, leaving a space between. Well, I must have got really overexcited, because during my evening performance, I got myself stuck. Brian and Pauline debated what to do and finally the solution was that Pauline would sit with me until nature took its natural course and I was freed. Needless to say, afterwards Pauline proceeded to cut the threads holding the bear’s legs together.

After their trip, we were ready for my first Christmas with my new family. Daryl’s stepmother, Nancy, arrived, and then it was the whirl of Christmas events and parties. Many of them I was not invited to, but some I did attend,

especially at the Dryans'. I did enjoy some good gifts, even though I got practical ones. I mean, a new bowl is great, but it is sort of the canine equivalent of getting socks from a maiden aunt.

We had a neat overnight away, visiting Christian and Cello in Pompano. They too were really friendly, but had the most neurotic and somewhat bad-tempered dog I had ever met. I had to give her some slack though - life can't be easy being a less than three-pound Chihuahua with bug eyes and a name like Giselle. My Alpha Dad and I had some escape from her when we took a long walk over causeway bridges and along the ocean front.

On the way back to Canada we stopped in Sarasota. We had lunch at the Kers' on New Year's Day, 2009. When they were over for dinner in Niagara later in the year, Vivian and Daryl talked about getting together in Florida again, and Vivian said, "Of course, you must bring Biscuit."

As was tradition, while in Sarasota, we stayed at the home of Henry and Felix. They were so welcoming and told me I could come back anytime.

It seemed like we were barely home when Brian and I were in the car again for Florida. It was Easter time, and one of my great treats was going to a dog-friendly restaurant in Naples when we picked Daryl up from the airport. In a time when dogs are being barred from so many harmless haunts, such as the post office in Niagara-

on-the-Lake, it is great to see this growing trend in Florida, and we hoped to get to other dog-friendly restaurants. Of course, we canines and our dinner companions were limited to the outdoor patios, but it was still eating at a restaurant!

I managed to create a bit of a stir during a visit to Russ's and Rob's house in Naples. I loved meeting their dogs, Annie and Skyler, but I got over-excited playing and fell into the swimming pool. Not being a natural swimmer, I held onto the edge with my front paws, and Alpha Dad dropped everything and ran over to save me, getting himself soaked in the process. What he hadn't realized, despite the look of panic on my face, was that the pool had a foot-wide ledge about a foot-and-a-half in the water. So while I was hanging onto the edge with my front paws, my back legs were firmly on the ledge and I was perfectly safe!

In the summer of 2009, Daryl had to work in northern Ontario again, so we made plans to go a day early to visit their old friend, Joanne Levy, who still owns the cottage next door to the one my dads had in the 1980s and early 1990s. After a long drive, we arrived at Whitestone Lake close to Parry Sound. Joanne was a bit nervous as it was the first time my dads would meet her new man, someone she had once loved 40 years ago. The evening went well, with the four of them, Joanne's sister who has the cottage next door, her stepdaughter, a black Lab, a Golden Retriever, and me.

The weather had been bad that summer, but the afternoon we arrived was lovely, and the next day was the one perfect day of summer. That meant that they had to squeeze absolutely everything in. My dads and I walked to the end of the road, just as they used to do with Casey, the Keeshond, then we had a canoe ride, then Alpha Dad insisted we do some training. We explored some more, and after a late lunch it was announced there would be a boat ride, followed by water-skiing. I regret a bit that I made it clear that I was in no mood to walk down to the lake again, and kept motioning to Nurturing Dad that I really wanted to go back into the cottage. However, he was tired too, so we spent a lovely afternoon inside with the lake breezes wafting in, and had a great nap. By the time we got to Penetanguishene that night and checked into a nice, new, pet-friendly motel, Daryl was exhausted and had trouble getting through some of his meetings the following day. He had to have a rest before we went to his nephew's for dinner. Served him right - he never could pace himself, but at least this time he did not exhaust me!



*Morning constitutional at Whitestone Lake*

## Silly Names and Silly Songs

My dads find themselves to be quite entertaining, and can be easily amused. Their constant patter and retelling of the same jokes is probably a contributing factor to their continued happiness in being together. However, it can all get to be a bit tedious at times.

One of the most precious things to a dog is his name, as with a limited comprehension for vocabulary, this is likely the first word he learns. It is a thing of comfort, for when he hears it, usually good things follow, like dinner or a walk. Patrick named me Biscuit, but called me Bisky, and

I was comfortable with both. With Brian and Daryl, over time many nicknames were invented for me, some clever, most really a bit silly. I got Bisk, Mr. Biscuit, Bisquit, Bisquito, Biscotto, Bisket-Wisket, McWisket, Boyo, Pommy Devil, Volpino, Biscuit-Little, Biscuit-Dog, and the one my Alpha Dad swore he would never use in the park for the embarrassment it would cause, Dog-Biscuit.

Of course, I was not the first to suffer their attempts at cleverness, and I didn't really mind as they were all expressions of affection. Mandy got Mandine, Mandy-Pandy, and Mandolin, to name a few. Amy got Amesbury, Amesbody, and Amesbottom. Casey had come off relatively unscathed, but Scamp got Scampi (remember he lived in England, where Scampi was a virtual national dish), Legal-Beagle (well, he was a purebred), and Scamp Fisher-Price Dog (his family's name was Fisher).

Then there were the many songs. To the tune of *Frosty the Snowman*, I got, "Biscuit the dog-boy, was a very special dog, he was very cute and very sweet, and he was a silly wog." Who could resist, "He's a little Biscuit-dog, Biscuit-dog, Biscuit-dog, and Biscuit was his name?" You can probably guess the tune. The shortest was the adaptation of the last five-syllable chorus of the advertisement for a well-known Hamilton carpet company. It simply went, "Pom-er-an-i-an!"

Again, my predecessors had not been spared. Mandy's favourite was, "Mandy Pandolina, Mandy Pandolina, sweet little girl dog. She's cute as can be, looks like a dog

flea, she's Mandy, Mandy Pandina, sweet little girl dog." For this one, Daryl composed the melody himself. Casey got, "Casey, Casey-dog, king of the wild back yard. Born on a kennel top in Ka-an-sas," and on it went for a couple of verses. But the one that was Brian's signature tune during Amy's and Mandy's long time with my dads that he would still sing for me was, to the well-known tune from *Les Miz*, "Can you hear the Bichons sing, singing a song of angry dogs? It is the music of the dogs who will not do obedience again."

Some of the songs even played a role in training and their daily lives. Even if Mandy and Amy were asleep in the family room, Brian would whistle *Colonel Bogie*, their nap song, and the dogs would wake up and follow him up the stairs for a threesome nap together. Of course, this one was never needed for me, as I would never be fully asleep during the day. As soon as Brian moved from one room to another, I was right at his feet!

The one that all the Canadian dogs got when stretched out on a cool floor on a hot Florida day was, "Tropical tile dog, tropical tile dog. S/he's a tropical tile dog, tile dog, tile dog."

And so it was. At least it kept them entertained, and it was mildly amusing to me.

# My Obedience Career

Some of my Alpha Dad's friends and colleagues think of him as being highly competitive. This is not really the case. It is true that he enjoys being right, especially if faced with illogical bureaucracy or poor customer service, and will argue relentlessly for fairness and social justice, and will negotiate endlessly for a good deal on purchases both in business and at home. However, he never needs to win to be "the best." In fact, it is more important for him to be part of a winning team than to be the ultimate winner or authority. It is important to my Alpha Dad to do well, but it really does not matter if someone is better. If someone is better, more than likely he or she will be invited over for cocktails.

So when my dad discovered obedience, it was a natural fit for him, and great for each of us dogs. Scamp had come fully formed, and it was too early in Daryl's life with dogs to have realized his potential. Casey went to

obedience classes and did relatively well. This was still in the time when the conventional wisdom and motivation in training was primarily fear and reward based, so they never went beyond basics.

When Mandy arrived, Daryl was determined that she be well behaved and responsive, especially because so many small dogs receive relatively little training, as their bad behaviour is less destructive than that of large dogs. Many people allow their small dogs to jump on people and furniture, and never become fully housebroken. An eight-pound Yorkie can be a nuisance if it leaps at you, but a German Shepherd Dog doing the same thing can be downright dangerous.

So off they went to classes at North York Obedience, a not-for-profit training school run by volunteers who teach others how to work with their dogs to make them the greatest companions they can be. All Daryl wanted was a well-behaved dog, and complained that the training was too geared to obedience trials. He soon learned that almost every trial preparatory exercise had a really good application in everyday life. Learning how to walk well is critical, as is learning to sit and stay, and to come when called. Formal obedience work takes this to a very high degree, more than one would need in most day-to-day life situations, but again, it just reinforces the lessons we learn to be good companions.

Mandy was a born natural at obedience work, and club members encouraged Daryl to think seriously about

going to trials for a title. The more they worked, the more they got hooked, so he decided to give it a go.

I should stop to explain the basics here. Most people know about dog shows, and many people have laughed at the antics in the movie *Best in Show*. There is an important distinction to make. In the dog world, there are two main streams of activity. The first is conformation and the second is obedience, with many related activities. When people think of dog shows, they usually think of conformation, which is all about conforming to a breed standard. This stream really is truly competitive, as a dog earns points based on how many dogs he beats in a given show.

When a dog earns enough points, he becomes a champion, and the letters Ch. can go before his name. One can keep competing over and over trying for higher accolade, such as best of breed, or best in show. By the time a dog makes it to Westminster, I can only think he or she must be utterly exhausted by the whole thing. To compete for conformation, a dog must obviously be a good specimen for his breed. (Remember, I would have been laughed out of a conformation ring because of my size for a Pomeranian.) He needs to be relatively well behaved and not mind being examined, able to run in a circle in a group, and perform some other basic moves. There is really nothing too intellectually taxing. Mandy came to my dads as a champion, but obedience work was new to her as well as to Daryl.

Obedience is the other main stream, and it consists of three levels. To achieve a level, one has to pass three trials under at least two different judges. When a dog completes novice, he earns a Companion Dog title (CD), for open, a Companion Dog Excellent (CDX), and with utility, he becomes an Obedience Trial Champion (OTCh). To make it more confusing, there are other trials one can do, such as graduate novice, somewhere between novice and open, but these are non-official classes, just for fun and sport, and there are no titles awarded.

After novice, even once you have your title in open and/or utility, you can “campaign,” which means continuing to trial at those levels to earn more points which might in a year put you in the top ten of your breed, your group (all breeds belong to a group such as Hounds, Non-Sporting, or Toy), or even one of the top ten obedience dogs in Canada. And one does not have to stop there. While the trials and the titles are essentially the same in Canada, the United States, and Bermuda, titles in one country under one national kennel club are not recognized by the others. That means you can do the whole thing over and over again in different countries. Those who are truly hooked often do.

The best thing about obedience, as opposed to conformation, is that the former is really not about competing against others, it is about doing your own personal best. Of course the better you do the more points you earn, especially important if you are

campaigning. The dogs in any given trial are ranked according to score, and you may get a special rosette, but you can still earn your title if you pass three trials, whether all the other dogs competing fail or get higher scores than you do. The scoring works in an interesting way. When a team goes into the ring, dog and handler, it starts out with a perfect score of 200. Points are deducted for errors, such as lagging in heeling, and a team can fail altogether for certain errors, such as the dog not returning to the handler on the first command on the recall.

It was this world that Mandy and Daryl entered and got to understand over time. Mandy went on to complete her CD and CDX in both Canada and the United States, though they never got to Bermuda. She also earned her Canine Good Citizen. So she ended up being Ch. Normandy's VIP of Crystalpines, CDX (Can/Am), CGC. Not only that, but she placed top obedience dog of her breed several times. Not that there were always nine Bichons following, in fact sometimes there were one or two, sometimes none.

In theory, every breed can learn to perform the obedience routines; jump heights, size of retrieving instruments, and so on are adapted accordingly. Unfortunately, not all breeds are created equal. My dad's hero in dog training was not the legendary Barbara Woodhouse in England, but Dr. Stanley Coren in British Columbia. In one of Dr. Coren's books, *The Intelligence of*

*Dogs*, he describes the I.Q. test he developed. He then went on to rate the various breeds he tested, from one to 79. It should be no surprise that the Border Collie, an obsessive working breed, was at the top in problem solving and being able to apply one lesson to different situations. Other top dogs include Labrador Retrievers, Shetland Sheepdogs, Standard Poodles, and the German Shepherd Dog. Is it any surprise that these breeds are often found in police and rescue work? At number 79 was the Afghan Hound, who it has been said, can have trouble learning his own name. Pomeranians come in respectably at 23, and Bichon Frises at 46.

So, when Daryl and Mandy started trialing, it was no surprise that their success caused a bit of a stir. In one trial, Mandy came in first place against several traditional obedience breed dogs. It wasn't that her score was all that high - the other dogs all failed! At trials, Daryl always gravitated to handlers with other non-traditional obedience breeds, the ones lower on Dr. Coren's list. Once he was very impressed by a woman who was trialing her Boxer in utility. When he complemented her persistence and drive, she responded by saying, "My dog may just live long enough to complete this title. I have met people we started novice with who are now doing utility with their third Sheltie or Lab."

When Amy joined them, their wonderful breeder and top supporter, Norma Dirszowsky said, "Now don't expect too much from her in obedience; you know, she isn't

Mandy.” Determined to prove the contention that any breed could do the work with the right training pace and lots of encouragement, Amy, who had not seen a collar or leash until she was almost five, went on to earn her CD and CDX in Canada, her CD in the United States, and her CGC. She was Normandy’s Amelia E, CDX, CD (Am), CGC.

Once Daryl gets the bug for something, he doesn’t stop. So while the girls got too old to go on to utility, he taught classes at North York Obedience for a few years. Of course, as an instructor as opposed to working with his own dog, he wasn’t teaching dogs, he was teaching their owners.

I didn’t mention all the other great things one can do with a dog beyond traditional obedience. There is agility, flyball, carting, and tracking, just to mention a few, all with their own awards and titles. Of course, we dogs couldn’t give a hoot about the titles, or for that matter even if we pass or fail a trial or test. But all of us, until we are too old or too ill, really want to work, and want to please the special person or people in our lives. And the time together going to trials or dog sports, actually doing the activity, and the countless hours waiting for our turns, give us each more quality time with that special someone.

The Canadian Kennel Club has been discussing the pros and cons of opening up obedience trials to non-purebred dogs for years. At this point, it is still limited to purebred

dogs, their antecedents normally proven through their pedigrees.

When Daryl and Brian decided to get a rescue dog, they realized it was unlikely or impossible that one would come with a pedigree. Of course, in my case, we knew nothing about where I came from or where I was born. This didn't stop them from adopting me, but once I had arrived and was responding really well to training in the basement and in the driveway, Daryl was compelled to find out if there was a way I could trial when I was ready. In the United States, he had heard about rescue dogs who appeared purebred being able to trial with something called a Purebred Alternative Listing, as opposed to a Registration Number linked to their breeders and pedigrees.

Daryl contacted the Canadian Kennel Club and found that a similar procedure applied in Canada! He got hold of the application forms and started to collect the information and material needed. A lot depended on Dr. Jim Turpel at Upper Canada Animal Hospital, who had to sign the back of front and side mug shots of me stated that he believed to the best of his professional knowledge that I was a purebred Pomeranian. Since I had no pedigree, he also had to state that I was "fixed." Angela was on duty at that point and explained that they could only say I appeared to be fixed, as it is possible that a male's - well to put it somewhat indelicately - testicles had not ever dropped.

Naturally, I found this whole discussion rather embarrassing.

Then on the form came the issue of my name. We all loved the name Biscuit, but this was not to be enough, at least for Daryl, and we could see his point. From past experience, Daryl realized that if we got to trials, each sponsoring dog club would produce a catalogue of the dogs enrolled. It would be bad enough that under date of birth, name of sire, name of dam and name of breeder, my listing would in each case say "unknown." I might as well wear a big sign saying, "I'm only here on the strength of a Performance Event Number." So he thought at least I should have a proper purebred-dog-sounding name.

Some of the names of purebred dogs sound just plain silly, like "Tailwind's Last Chance." Most have something about the breeder, like "Normandy's VIP of Crystalpines," Normandy being the breeder's kennel name, and Crystalpines being the name of the kennel where Mandy was raised and the kennel that took her through to her conformation championship. Daryl liked the idea of the link to a location, a bit like the formal names of British aristocracy, like Lord Black of Crossharbour. (Perhaps that wasn't the best example to use.) So, I became Neapolitan Biscuit of the Parkway, which had references to my homes in Florida and Niagara, and of course included my "real" name.

We had been training since I arrived, and it was going really well. For novice trials there are several exercises.

The heel on leash consists of fast, slow, and normal paces as called out by the trial judge, along with halts, right turns, left turns and about turns. My heeling, walking on my handler's left side with a slack lead was good to start. I had to learn to sit automatically on the halts, and to keep pace with the changing speeds. The figure-eight is the same idea, but performed around posts, which are not posts at all, but ring stewards. The hard part to learn here is to adapt one's pace to keep with the handler as one is weaving in a figure-eight pattern.

I had never done anything like the stand for examination, but there wasn't much to it, as far as I was concerned. In this exercise, the handler stands his dog, gives him the "Stay" command and/or signal, walks to the end of the lead and faces the dog. The judge touches the dog's head, runs his hand along the dog's back, and the dog cannot change the position of his feet, lick or jump on the judge, or perform any other atrocity. Then the judge tells the handler to return to his dog, at which point the handler walks around the dog, never letting the lead touch the ground, and goes to the handler's spot in heel position. As I explained, there are points off for minor infractions and automatic failure for major ones. It is not just up to the dog. Once Daryl lost a point with Mandy when he returned to heel position and stopped next to her back rather than next to her shoulders. She was not pleased, thinking that if she could heel, he could learn the basics too.

After this exercise comes the heeling off lead, which is essentially the same as the heeling on lead. It is just a lot harder without that lifeline that connects dog to handler, as we later learned.

Most dogs learn to come when called, but learning to do it on the first and only cue, whether verbal or by a signal, is a bit harder. I rarely missed this one. However, in trials, it isn't enough just to amble in, hang about, and expect a pat. I had to learn to run in a straight line, and then sit directly facing my dad, within arm's reach. Then when the judge called out "Finish," I was supposed to end up next to my dad in heel position. My dad liked to say I learned to do it four ways. I could do it either by verbal command or signal (stretching the point, that's two ways), and either pivot to my right and end up on his left side, or go to my left and walk around behind him, again ending up in heel position. Okay, so that's two ways. With the different commands it's four, but he was really milking this one.

In a trial, that's it for the individual exercises, and when your handler gets the lead back from a steward and you leave the ring, your handler has a pretty good idea if you passed or failed so far. As a dog, you don't really care, but you do want your handler to be happy, and you can sense if you have ruined his entire day.

The last two exercises are done in a group, so depending on the order you went in for the individual exercises, you might have to wait around for a half-hour or more, or go

right back in if you are the last team in the individual exercises. The last two exercises consist of no more skill than being able to stay put, which is not easy for all dogs. For an older dog, it was not especially difficult to learn to sit for one minute or lie down for three. The secret, of course, is not to move if you hear distractions from other rings, and not to move even when your handler returns from the other side of the ring until the judge says, "Exercise finished."

It was a good thing that my Alpha Dad had learned and believed in the newer methods of training, which are based on positive reinforcement, and not on criticism and fear. In perfecting my heeling, we never even used a choke collar for corrections, just my regular walking buckle collar. Encouragement, along with a few treats, was all I needed.

After working on our own, we went to Daryl's old club, North York Obedience, for classes. Of course Daryl knew the basics of training, but could always use observations and pointers from colleagues, and we needed to work around other dogs for distraction and to get the feel to what it would be like to be in a trial environment with lots of noise and dogs and people milling about. Not to mention that one can hardly perfect the group sits and downs alone!

Training isn't always easy, and once a dog has learned a new pattern or behaviour, it doesn't mean it is instantly stuck in his memory. This is not all that different from

the way humans learn. The most important thing my dad says, is to be consistent. Dogs have limited vocabularies, so while, "Dixie, come," may mean the same to you as, "Over here, girl," pick one phrase or the other for her recall and use only the one. The second most important thing, according to my dad, is to create an environment in which the dog has little choice but to succeed. If your dog will not do a recall in a straight line, work in a narrow hallway, or set up boards on either side of the path you want him to run, then praise him lavishly when he does it. The third is being patient, and keep working, but never if the dog is over-tired or you are getting frustrated or cranky. His final bit of advice is to work in slow increments. The first time you want your dog to come, don't try it from 30 feet, try it from two, and slowly work up every time there is success, literally a foot at a time.

Training took a lot of patience for both of us. Most Spitz breeds are very expressive with their paws, so shaking hands came naturally. So, I would hold up a paw a few inches off the ground, and Daryl would shake it and say "How do you do, Biscuit?" I was really glad that I could teach Daryl something, given all the effort he was going to. But honestly, a human should be able to tell the difference between a gently outstretched paw, and a dog's front leg held up almost over his head with his paw flat. I thought if I heard "How do you do Biscuit?" as Daryl grabbed my front leg high in the air one more time I was going to give up. Then finally one day he got it, stretched his hand out flat, smacked it against my paw and shouted

“High five!” I was so proud and remembered the time Patrick and I perfected it.

Alpha Dad wondered if we should try to trial before Nurturing Dad and I would leave for Florida. Then again, I had only been with them for nine months, and he had promised himself not to rush me, especially as I was an older dog who could still learn new tricks, but not as fast. So we kept practising whenever we were together, then in February 2009 we booked in for trials in Ancaster, now part of Hamilton.

Most dog clubs, under the auspices of the Canadian Kennel Club, will offer two trials over a Saturday and Sunday, with two sets each day at each obedience level. Sometimes they are combined with a conformation show; sometimes two smaller clubs go back to back. The idea is that a dog and handler can have four tries in a weekend, and since only three qualifying scores are needed to get a title, it can conceivably all be done in one weekend. Well, we will leave that to younger Border Collies and Shelties.

It was our first trial, and Daryl’s first time in the ring in six years. He was nervous and excited, but we pulled it off, with a score in the high 180s, and since there were not a lot of dogs entered, we came second place and got a nice rosette. Unfortunately, this really was beginner’s luck on my part, and by the second trial of the day I was tired, and actually decided to lie down just before the long sit was over. So we failed that one. The next day he dragged

me back and by this point, I was scared of the ring and couldn't do the heel free.

Handlers are always learning about their dogs, and it can be a humbling experience. Daryl learned that I was a one-trial-a-day dog, and couldn't cope with waiting around in a cold, noisy hall for hours for my next turn. He realized he didn't know me as well as he thought, so he asked one of the judges for advice. Debbie Desjardins runs one of Canada's foremost training schools, Campaign Dog Academy, and suggested we take a break from trials and come to a novice trial preparation class there. Daryl had done advanced work with Mandy and Amy at Campaign when they got to the point that they needed more help than a not-for-profit volunteer club such as North York Obedience could provide.

So in the dead of winter once a week, we were off to Campaign, now in Georgetown on a beautiful farm. Daryl commented that these were much nicer surroundings and a better facility than the old industrial mall it was in before, but Brampton had been much closer.

We joined the novice trial preparation course, taught by Debbie's friend and colleague from the early days, obedience judge, Isobel Hutton. Daryl had known Isobel for several years and knew this would be worth our while. Isobel is a short woman with health problems that could make walking difficult, yet somehow she always managed to be everywhere she was needed in a training or trial ring. She knew what every handler and dog was

doing at any moment and would call out instructions aimed at individuals rather than the group. She could be hard to understand at times, with one of those types of Scottish accent that is never diminished by time.

Daryl had, at times, felt demoralized in Isobel's classes, for to say she was picky was an understatement. Everyone had to work toward perfection, so even if a dog could do a perfect recall, but then a crooked sit, dog and handler had to keep working. However, this was a minor issue, because Isobel's classes, in addition to being a great learning experience for both dog and handler, were just so much fun! She could invent all sorts of great games that, to us dogs, just seemed like play with our handlers, but were really aimed at improving our exercises.

Now and then, just for variety, Isobel would ask each dog and handler team to demonstrate a trick that had nothing to do with obedience work. Of course, my dad and I had our repertoire here. I could lie down and roll over, shake hands, give a "high five," and our favourite, first sit on my haunches like a meerkat, then dance on my hind legs like a circus dog as my dad would hum a circus tune. Of course, I have to say with all modesty that the only one he taught me was the rollover. The rest I taught him.

I explained before that in training positive reinforcement and reward are key. It was not always easy for my dad to find a reward I was interested in. I did not want to chase a

ball or Frisbee for a break from training, and for the most part, I was not terribly interested in food. Training reward treats had to be really special to get my attention. Isobel would remind the group that treats were to be a reward for something done well given immediately after the fact, not held out in front to encourage the behaviour as a bribe. Treats were to be used less and less, as in the trial ring, the most a handler can do is gently praise his dog. No food is allowed.

To perfect our heel-free, which seemed to give me trouble, Daryl thought I needed to learn to be comfortable walking off-lead in other than purely trial or training situations. He would never walk a dog off-lead on a city street, no matter how well trained, as dogs can still do dumb or dangerous things. However, we were lucky to live in semi-country, so every weekend we would walk down our road, and through some grapevines to the Inniskilin parking lot, which was always completely empty before the winery's opening hours. We would walk off-lead as if this was a perfectly natural thing to do, then practise sits, downs, and recalls by the entrance to the tasting barn. There were two rows of square grey concrete slabs spaced about eight feet apart in the red brick patio area in front of the tasting barn and events room. They were there to record and commemorate award winning vintages, but they were perfect for us to practice figure-eights!

To complete our morning experience, we would walk along the side of one of the main buildings by the parking lot. There was a series of large decorative rocks, and as we got close, my dad would point and say, "Up," and I'd jump on the first rock, walk along and he'd go a bit ahead, sit on one of the last rocks, and wait for me to have a cuddle before we set off for home.

Besides our work at Campaign, we also went to a couple of what are called correction matches. These are the same as real trials, except the handler can correct in the ring, and the final scores are just for practice, not towards a title. So we were ready when the St. Catharines and District Kennel and Obedience Club held its trials in Grimsby in late April 2009 at the Sportsworld Leisure Centre. It sounds much grander than it is, for it is really just a large tin arena, perfect for dog trials. Saturday morning was a great success. We passed with a score in the high 180s. Two down, one to go. The judge commented that we seemed like a really good team, in tune with each other.

This time, my dad had the sense not to push me, and despite having paid for the second trial of the day, he told the trial secretary we were going to quit while we were ahead, as I was really a one-trial-a-day dog. Her response was that learning to know one's dog is the most important thing a handler can do for obedience, and for the relationship. She wished us well for Sunday.

We were back again, under the same judge, Cheryl Bishop. Some judges can be a bit intimidating, and the whole thing can be nerve-wracking for the handler and stressful for the dog. She had a manner that just makes everyone, dogs and handlers, as comfortable as possible, given the situation. Handlers often chat about how crazy they are to keep trialing, when it can be so hard on the nerves. However, my dad got to have that amazing feeling that comes when, after having passed two trials, in the final trial after returning to the dogs after the group long down, the judge says "Exercise finished." At that moment the handler knows a title has been earned, and all the work had been worthwhile.

So it was for us. After the scores are tallied, the judge invites the qualifying teams back to the ring to accept their qualifying ribbons and hear their scores. Again we were in the high 180s and placed second for the trial. On leaving, my dad told the judge that I was not a young dog usually found in novice but an eight- or nine-year-old rescue. She congratulated both of us and told us we were amazing. My new long name finally had a reason. I was Neapolitan Biscuit of the Parkway, CD!

So, armed with our qualifying ribbon, a huge rosette for second place, and another rosette courtesy of the hosting club for completing our title, we were ready to go home to celebrate. Just as we were about to leave, the trial secretary told us we really should have our photo taken. My dad had never bothered about photos at shows, but

this time did. As we posed for the professional photographer, my dad mused on just how fickle yet sometimes amazing life can be. There I was being photographed with someone who loved me, with ribbons celebrating new learning and accomplishments, when only a year and a half before, I was perilously close to being euthanized. Never give up hope, ever!



### *On earning my Companion Dog title*

Besides celebrating the event, it was also one of our best photos. Do you see how my dad has one hand behind my head? His fingers were holding my ears erect, as I was concentrating so hard, of course they went flat!

We weren't done, but took a couple of days off. Well, maybe it was just the rest of the day. We started working on Open, which is far more difficult, and involves all heeling off lead, and longer group sits and downs. The real work comes in the drop on recall, when the dog is expected to stop mid-stream on a verbal or signal command and drop on the spot until called again. Then there is the dumbbell retrieve, both on the flat and over a high jump. This comes easily for some breeds, the ones that have "Retriever" in their breed names, but not for a lot of us. The remaining exercise is the broad jump, when on cue the dog jumps over a series of flat boards raised slightly off the ground, and circles in front of his handler. We knew this would take a long time and were in no hurry, but kept working slowly over the next few weeks.



### ***Working on Open***

The Canine Good Neighbour test is another CKC sanctioned trial, and the name says it all. It consists of a series of exercises not geared to instant reactions and precision, but just to ensure that one has a Good Dog, who can behave well in most situations. The tests are geared to replicate real-life situations, such as stopping to meet and talk to someone, someone asking if he can pat the handler's dog, walking through a milling crowd, and reacting to unusual distractions, such as a person walking with crutches or in a wheelchair. There is also a time

when the handler leaves his dog in the care of another person for a short time. Of course there is heeling on lead, and a recall, also on lead. Again, precision is not required, just responsiveness.

Any dog who has earned a Companion Dog title should fly through this test and will probably find most of it a bit boring, or as a long-gone generation of public-school-educated English would say, “*Infra dig.*” However, we weren’t going to be deterred.

My dad was really pleased to learn that the test was being held in June, offered with the North York Obedience trials. So one rainy Saturday morning, off we all went to Pine Point Area, or as my dads affectionately referred to it, “Pin Pont,” harking back to the years that letters fallen off the building had not been replaced.

One of my dad’s favourite dog-world colleagues, Marci Jameson, was the judge for this test. We got to go at the beginning, and we did so well that we were asked to help out and be the “distraction dog” for others during their tests. It was great fun, and Marci was so gentle and encouraging, even to the teams that failed. Of course, it was not a given that we would pass. In our test, the main distraction was someone on crutches. If we had had the usual, someone riding through the area on a bicycle, it would have been game over, for surely I would have barked like crazy!

Now I was Neapolitan Biscuit of the Parkway, CD, CGN. This is not really all that much to brag about, because

many dogs go on to far greater accomplishments, with multiple titles after their names. However, given my breed, my background, my age when I started, my health, and the fact that we did this in a relatively short period of time, we did have a lot to be proud of. My dad often worried that I might start one of my coughs or wheezing attacks in the middle of the heel free and we'd fail the trial because I would have to stop, but it never happened. For some reason or reasons unknown, I was always as healthy as possible in the trial ring and never coughed once.

In the fall we went back to North York, but at the open level they don't really offer formal classes, just some ring time and peer support. My dad had us registered to go back to Campaign after Florida and the Christmas holidays, but for reasons you will soon learn, we never got there.

# All Good Things Come to an End

Death comes in many ways, and at many speeds. Flowers may slowly wither as the days get longer and the air cooler, until they are no longer there and it is time to pluck the dead blossoms to prepare the host plant for winter. Then again, a flower may be in bloom one day, and gone the next due to an early flash frost.

Some people die suddenly and unexpectedly, as the result of war, accidents, or of unpredicted health crises such as heart attacks, strokes, or brain aneurisms. Some just waste away over time, either as a result of slow disease, or simply as age wears them out.

For domestic pets, it is much the same as for people, except that in the case of those who die slowly there is always the heavy responsibility on those who love them to decide when the time comes to help them along.

Long before my time, Daryl and Brian had much experience in this arena. Brian's mother died of cancer in

her early 70s after a short but painful experience. Daryl's mother died quickly when the time came, but had really been dying for over nine years since the onset of Parkinson's, as her energy and interest slowly but steadily ebbed away. Because they were not young men, and had many friends over the years, they had seen many kinds of death, but never became blasé or accustomed to it.

They had seen the passing of several pets. Cleo, a black cat with a huge personality and even larger voice, was about to make the final trip to the vet's office and disappeared. The instinct to die alone was so strong, that after a couple of days of not moving, she went into a long narrow closet, climbed over winter boots, Christmas decorations, and camping gear, to the most private spot in the house to die under the last stair. Casey, the Keeshond, died at the bottom of the basement stairs, waiting for the vet, who was delayed, to come to give him the final bit of help when he was dying of cancer. The urge to die alone is not limited to animals. Many people have told stories of spending hours at a bedside vigil, to leave to go to the hospital cafeteria for a cup of coffee, and finding that the loved one had died in the meantime.

There is a wonderful poem about the relationship between caregiver and pet. Essentially, it says that three days stay in the owner's mind the most. They are the day of meeting the new family member, the day of realization, by observing slowness of gait or white on the muzzle that "the child who never grows up" is actually

old. Finally there is the day the beloved pet dies. It is a bit like Edith Piaf's *Les Trois Cloches*, or for my American readers, *The Three Bells*. The hardest part is having to make the decision if the pet does not go naturally. Mercifully, my dads did not have to make that choice for me.

Not even all veterinarians have the same approach, or the same approach in each situation. When my dad's Bichon, Amy, became more and more uncomfortable, our vet, Angela, said to Brian, "I can't make the decision for you, Mr. Harrison, but you will know when the time has come." They took Amy in and Daryl held her as Angela administered the final dose to take her off, and Angela then said, "You made the right decision." Just a few months later, when Mandy took a major turn for the worse and Brian took her to Upper Canada Animal Hospital, after detailed examination, Angela said, "She is beyond helping and about to experience major pain. You must let her go now, today." So Daryl rushed back from Toronto, and held her too. He could hardly tell when her heart had stopped, for she had become so weak. Mandy was only very sick for a few days, but had been dying slowly for about three years, as her walking became harder, and her interest in activities and in people lessened and lessened.

When did I start to die? Some say one starts to die as soon as one is born. It's a bit like an obedience trial. We all start out in the ring (of life) with a perfect score of 200

and we go down from there. However, if you have ever been in an obedience trial with your dog, you know there is a major difference between losing a couple of points on a poor finish and starting the heel free and realizing that your dog is lagging far behind. You may try a heroic, "Rex, heel," which will lose you points, but you know if that doesn't work, it is all over.

I have said before that Daryl was worried about me and my health almost from the beginning of my stay in my forever home with him and Brian. However, while most of the time there were just minor scares, for example if I lost a few ounces, finally the worries had substance.

In late October 2009, my "bad days" had increased in number. Brian took me in for more x-rays, and my heart had increased in size. This of course meant that my heart was beginning to press against my damaged trachea. Not only was I coughing, at times I was beginning to have trouble breathing. My meds dosage was increased, and all seemed okay again. Off we went on our drive to Florida, my dad and me.



***The Florida Everglades - my last photo with Alpha Dad***

When Daryl got there in mid-November, I must have been having a bad day, for when we met him at the airport after three weeks apart, I barely looked up. He could only stay for four days, and by the following day we were back to walking and training for open. I still had a great time enjoying my walks with Brian, and spent some real quality time with Grandma Nancy, who would stay home with me when Brian went Christmas shopping.

By mid-December when Daryl got there again, he noticed that I had lost so much weight that my collar needed to be moved to the next buckle. I was never as keen on open work as I was on novice, but while I tried to do the

jumps, the dumbbell, and all the off-lead, my heart just didn't seem to be in it, both literally and figuratively.

Daryl shopped for Christmas for us, and I got Brian a frame that said, "Live, Love, Lick," with room for a picture of me. Daryl had a bad feeling when he was picking this for me, a sort of premonition. Nevertheless, Daryl got me the best present I have ever had. The bike trailer was perfect, and we spent hours riding around the neighbourhood. Mostly, I was good and sat and took in the scenery. I only barked if Brian was riding on his bike and got too far out of sight. I still had the energy to be a good host at the annual Florida Christmas cocktail party, and 35 people in my home did not faze me at all. We even did a tour of the Everglades. Along with friends Marg and Jim, we had lunch at an outdoor restaurant, which meant I was included. The walk along the boardwalk though a nature reserve was long, but great, as something in the damp air made me breathe better.

In early January the wonderful Pauline and Clair arrived to look after me when my dads went on a cruise. Clair commented on how much weight I had lost and how much more I was coughing. At this point, I wasn't too concerned, as I had been coughing for years, and because I had so much fur to disguise my weight loss, I still looked great.

The diarrhea was not pleasant. This started when Daryl and Brian got back to Florida and just before we started our travels back to Canada. Mercifully, I had no problems

when we stayed with their friends Henry and Felix in Sarasota, where once again I was the canine life of the party.

The week after we got back to Canada, we experienced the doomed feeling a handler can get during the “heel free” when his dog is far behind. Angela took yet another x-ray, and my heart was huge. She upped my medication dosage to the point that it endanger my liver, but there was not a lot to lose. I got great pills for the diarrhea, and diuretics to take some of the water off my heart. Of course, the diuretics meant that I had to pee constantly. My dads were really good about letting me out more often, and I am proud to say I never had an accident, but sometimes by the time I got outside, I could discharge what seemed like gallons.

Brian asked Angela what my prognosis was, and she said I probably had only two or three months left. He and Daryl were devastated, although I didn't really know what was going on, just that I didn't feel at all like my old self. Life has many small ironies, and the following Monday Daryl went to Parry Sound for a meeting and stayed in the same room in the hotel that he had just two years before when he had the long conversation about me with Laurie. This did not make him feel a whole lot better.

The idea of my impending death was so hard for them to take, partly because I showed no signs of aging. My face was fairly blonde, so if there were white hairs on my muzzle, they couldn't be easily seen. I still had clear eyes,

I wasn't slow of gait, not arthritic, and could still jump on a bed two and a half feet off the ground, more than twice my height. And I was not very old.

There are several theories about how to compare dog years to human years. One is that there are seven human years for every dog year. Another, since dogs mature so quickly, is 21 human years for the first dog year, then five for each year thereafter. Yet another theory is that the age comparison has to be done on a sort of sliding scale, depending on the size and breed - a Miniature Poodle might live to 17, while a Great Dane will rarely make it to 10.

It was hard to figure out how old I would be in human years, not only due to the range of theories, but also due to the not insignificant detail that no one knew exactly when I was born. My dads had picked my arrival date as my birthday, and having been told I was seven when I arrived, I would be coming up to nine. Angela swore I must be older, and then Daryl found a paper in my file from PSBR that said I was born in 2000. So in human year equivalents, I was probably in my middle 60s at that point. Not old, but not young.

The next few weeks were hard on us all. Brian gave me pills constantly. Daryl thought we should try alternative remedies, so he took me off to a local chiropractor who works on horses and domestic pets as well as people. The therapeutic massages really helped calm me and made me feel better. The first time, Suzanne worked on

me as Daryl watched. Because he was having neck and shoulder problems, Suzanne agreed to work on him at the same time, so then I lay patiently and watched him!

The massage and drugs seemed to help, and at one point Angela changed her prognosis to up to a year, but reminded Daryl that there were no guarantees. That was the day he called her to see if a portable oxygen tank would help when I was really having trouble breathing. (Not a piece of equipment on the market for dogs.) I would still roll in fresh snow, still loved snuggling and burrowing into the pillows on the bed, and still showed signs of my old happy self.

February came, and it was my second anniversary with my dads in my forever home. They had a toast to me and I had a treat, but it didn't feel like much of a celebration, knowing what was probably in store.

Over the next couple of weeks, I really started to change. I was no longer interested in many activities, and when Daryl took me out, he would have to carry me a block. I would gladly walk back, but I just couldn't be bothered to walk away from the house or the apartment building, even if it meant looking for good sniffs. I still refrained from having accidents inside; however, at the apartment, I began to think that the stairwells and hallways were as good as outside. Worst of all, I often was so short of breath that I just sat in one place with my head raised as if I were about to bay at the moon. I was just trying to get enough air.

One of my dads stayed with me almost all of the time. It didn't stop their social life, and on February 13 we were all invited to a fabulous party in King City. Daryl had met Marilyn Harding when she was on the board of the King Township Public Library. She was having her first party with her new man, and it was the first big party she had had since her husband had died.

It was a snowy night, and we didn't know how long the drive from Toronto would take, so we ended up arriving first. It was a magical night, with a gentle snow surrounding the breathtaking Ron Thom-designed house. We took my crate, but I spent all my time with Daryl or Brian as they talked to the amazing assortment of musicians, visual artists, writers, and therapists. Everyone was really kind to me. At one point Daryl took me out for the necessary, and we stayed while he had a cigarette and together looked at the snowfall and then each other. It was a special moment for us.

However, the highlight of the evening was my massage by Marilyn's friend Candice, a registered massage therapist and alternative healer. Candice had been a mainstay in helping George, Marilyn's late husband, prepare for his own death. Marilyn told us that Candice was a great healer, but that healing sometimes was about healing the soul enough to let go when the body can no longer be healed. Being just a dog, I didn't really understand all this, but I did leave the party with a sense of calm that was impressed my dads.

The following week we were in Niagara, and on Sunday, went to Home Depot, where I had one of my favourite treats, riding in the cart as my dads went shopping. On the way home, we ran into their friend Elaine, whom they had not seen for several months, and discussed town gossip. One of their mutual friends in Palm Beach had just died. We had planned to visit her and her husband during our next trip to Florida at the end of March. My dads explained that it was really sad, because she had been a great philanthropist; one of her causes was homeless animals, and I was to have met her three small dogs, at least one of which was a rescue. As they talked, I barked at everything that went by, just as if I were a healthy young dog.

At the end of the next week we stayed in Toronto on the Friday, as Daryl had to present at a conference there the following day. When they were about to go to their old friend Vivien's for dinner, as usual, Brian said, "Can Biscuit come?" and Daryl reminded us that they had to leave me at home, as hers was a strict "no pets" building with security cameras everywhere. So, I had a quiet evening, and when they got back, Daryl was pleased that I was not coughing or gasping. We had a good short walk, then all went to bed, glad that I was having a good day.

February was a very significant month for me. It was the month that my first dad, my wonderful Patrick, died. It was the month that I joined Daryl and Brian in my forever

home and embarked on a life of activities that I never dreamed of. Finally, February is the month that I died.

On Saturday, Feb. 27, 2010, I woke up at 3:00 a.m. and started gasping and coughing, which I had done before. This time it didn't stop. Brian took me out for another pee, and when we came back, I must have had a tiny stroke, as for a moment my look was distorted and I started to fall over. My dads took turns sitting with me in the bedroom, the other trying to sleep on the living room couch. Brian took me out again a bit after 6:00, and when I came back for a moment everything was fine. I lay down in my favourite sphinx position, with my ears erect. Daryl looked at me intently, because he knew time was getting really short. Then the coughing and gasping started again. Brian called the vet's office in Niagara-on-the-Lake and left a message to call as soon as it opened.

At 7:00, Daryl had me on the bed, and he planned to stay with me for half an hour. I was getting weaker and weaker. I made two half-hearted attempts to get down, but Daryl gently held my collar and said, "Stay here with me, Biscuit." I was too tired to struggle. As well, my natural instinct to find a quiet place to die alone was not nearly as strong as my separation anxiety. I spent the last two years happiest when my dads were by my side, and if I had to check out, that was the way I was going to do it. Except for the discomfort, the whole experience for me was really peaceful, and I don't think I was even really scared. We knew this time was going to come so much

sooner than we had wished for, but we were ready. About 7:25 my organs started to shut down and it was clear I was near the end. Daryl knelt on the bed next to me, and Brian sat on the floor in front of me, both stroking me gently. At 7:30 my head twisted, and a few moments later I was gone. I had given up the ghost. I truly “had the biscuit,” as the old expression goes.

The moment of death of a loved one, be it human or animal, is fraught with many emotions. Brian copes by dealing with his emotions, slowly and patiently. Daryl needs to have something to do. First, he cancelled his meeting. Then he took the lid off my crate and made an open coffin of the bottom half lined with a lovely old blanket from his great-grandmother. He placed me gently in it and covered it with a towel. Brian carried me to the elevator and to the car, where he placed my coffin on the folded-down seat. It was fitting, I suppose, that my last drive with my dads was from Toronto to Niagara, a trip we had done so many times. They said their final goodbyes to me at Angela’s office, before I was sent off to Guelph to be cremated. Ironical in a sense, as Guelph was where I started my new life in October of 2007.

A wise friend of my dads’, a psychotherapist who had died recently at the age of 94, used to say that one’s greatest strengths are often one’s greatest weaknesses as well. Perhaps the opposite was also true. My separation anxiety was something my dads kept trying to work on with me. They would try to leave me for short periods of

time without making a fuss, then come back as if nothing had happened - the idea was that I would get used to being alone. Unfortunately, it never really worked, and at the ripe age of nine or ten, I still had to be left in my crate when they went out for more than a few minutes. This was the weakness in my personality.

Its strength was that I was always attentive - I just had to be with them at all times, and the most they could pull off was nipping out to the front screened-in porch for a drink and for Daryl to have a cigarette if I was asleep on the kitchen floor. But as soon as I appeared at the door, they were always glad to have me with them.

It was my constant presence that made my death so difficult for them. I told you that Mandy, the Bichon, died slowly over several years, a lot like an old human who just wore out after time. When she died, they missed the memory of what she had been more than missing the elderly ill dog she had become. While they always worried about me, I became seriously ill so fast, and even then I could never let them out of my sight. They continued to see me everywhere for several weeks after.

The day I died Daryl sent an e-mail to several friends who were particularly close and to those who were devoted "dog people." He called Marie and they cried together. Laurie was not home when Daryl called, as she was in Niagara Falls with her "crazy dog lady" colleagues from PSBR, but Daryl spoke to Paul.

One of the great things about a small town like Niagara-on-the-Lake is that it is not unusual for people to place obituaries for their pets. Mine appeared the following Thursday with a small picture of me. It read:

**Neapolitan Biscuit of the Parkway, CD, CGN  
2000-2010**



First a stray, then orphaned, then rescued again, you came to your forever home as a “hard to place” older dog with a heart condition. Yet in two short years you earned two obedience titles, and were the quintessential party animal in Niagara, Toronto, and Florida, charming everyone you met. While you are back with Patrick now, we love you Biscuit, and miss you.

Your dads, Daryl and Brian

They were amazed and touched with all the attention they received. Flowers from Upper Canada Animal Hospital, countless e-mails, and several cards, even from people they had not met, like Marie's former neighbour in Kenmore. Several of the PSRB volunteers remembered me, even though they had only met me once or twice in passing. Gentleness and a positive attitude really do make a difference, and that is what they remembered about me.

My dads often thought about all the wonderful things we had done together, and also about things planned that we never got to do. We never did get around to sharing an ice cream at the Dairy Queen overlooking the city on Broadview Avenue in Toronto, something they had done with all their Canadian dogs. And while Mandy could brag about earning her own frequent flyer points, I had never ridden in an airplane. That might not have happened anyway, as I was a bit too tall to fit in an under-the-seat Sherpa bag. Alpha Dad never got to give me a bath, something he loved doing with the Bichons. I was such a clean and sweet-smelling dog that I had only been bathed and groomed twice in my last two years, before each wedding at our house. He planned to do it himself the next time.

They both said they needed a sign from me that I had reached the Rainbow Bridge, that all was fine, and that they didn't need to worry, even though they would be sad. The most significant card was from Marie, and she

included a photo of me as a young, robust dog having just had a bath and a blow-dry in 2003. In her note she even said that my two best years had been my last two with Daryl and Brian, which showed exactly the kind of grace and kindness which made Marie, well, Marie. As Brian was reading the card, of course he started to cry, and then he looked up, forgetting he had the television on in the background. At that moment, on TV appeared a large Pomeranian with my colouring, ambling along happy as could be with his master. That was the sign for Brian.

Daryl's first sign was more subtle. Remember I said I used to run back and forth on the balcony in Toronto in search of birds, and would often stop at the crack at the end where I could see out? One day, Daryl went out and a leaf rushed from one side of the balcony to the other, then back again. When it got to the crack at the end it flew out, and soared into the sky before it disappeared. Daryl's second sign, which has kept me alive in his heart daily, was the inspiration to write my story.



### ***Constant Reminder***

There are many theories about the grieving process. The most common one is that there are five key stages. Because they knew about my health problems even before they met me, my dads were able to escape the first three stages of denial, anger, and bargaining. After the intense activity that comes immediately after a death, they went through a period of the change in their lives as the new reality was actually sinking in. For weeks they would hear a noise and think it was me in another room, go to put on their shoes subconsciously thinking it

was time for my evening walk, or prop the door open on the apartment balcony so that I could come out, as they did when they had a drink after Daryl got home from work. Along with the realization sinking in, they went into the fourth stage of grieving, depression.

The final step is acceptance. Over time, their grief grew less - as anyone who has ever experienced loss knows, time is the great healer. At first, when they drove to Florida again, they saw me everywhere and cried easily. They marked every Saturday morning by the number of weeks since I had died. Then, slowly, they began to accept. In April, Daryl went to a meeting in Sudbury and stayed at the same hotel we had stayed in August 2008. His dear friend, colleague, and boss, Laurey Gillies, had said the final goodbye to her aged cat the day before. As they were walking past the courtyard, Laurey said, "When I look out, I still see you, Brian, and Biscuit there." Daryl responded by saying, "Three weeks ago if you said that I would have burst into tears. Now it is still sad, but gives me a warm feeling."

My ashes now sit on one of the tables in the study in Niagara, which I refer to as the Pet Trophy Room and Mausoleum. There are four dogs and a cat there now. Little did I ever guess the first time I saw that room with one entire wall devoted to Amy's and Mandy's awards, and their urns and photos, that I would have space of my own, both for awards, and finally my urn. Of course, I didn't earn as many ribbons or titles as they had, but only

because I didn't have time. There is a beautiful large photo of me taken by Sheila Brazys, and one of me with Brian, taken on that idyllic day on Whitestone Lake my last summer. And, yes, it is in the "Live, Love, Lick" frame. But there was even more. Pauline painted a beautiful water-colour portrait of me which now hangs in the front hall of my dads' house in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

My dads have talked about the freedom and flexibility that comes with not having a dog. They talked about the great world travelling they could do when Daryl retires. However, they are truly dog people. When they talked about the fact that getting another dog would mean that travelling would be more limited, Brian said, "So I guess if it's a choice between a dog and seeing the pyramids, I'd rather have another dog." That's my dad!

A few months later, Rusty came into their lives to fill my spot, but never take my place. Over time, he will develop his own place in their lives. The best tribute to me is that Rusty is another rescue, though younger and healthier, and a Victorian Pomeranian!

So, bit by bit, their memory of the specifics of living with me and the impact on their daily lives become fainter, as it should. All that matters is that they remember how they cared about me and me about them. So it is fitting that at this point my story ends.

All in all, things were not bad for a rescue dog who had come perilously close to being "euthanized." It was not a long life, and not nearly long enough in my forever home,

but I did *have* a forever home. This was much more than so many dogs have, who for no reason of their own making, find themselves homeless later in life. The trips, the outings, the obedience work, the constant love and attention were all a dog could ask for. And finally, my Alpha Dad took the time to write my story, with my inspiration, of course.

As you come to the end of my story, you may be left wondering whether Patrick was there to meet me at the Rainbow Bridge. Of course, I can't tell you that. To find the answer, you only need to look deep into your own soul. Your answer will depend on one thing, and one thing only.

How much do you believe in the power of love?

Just this side of heaven is a place called *Rainbow Bridge*.

When an animal dies that has been especially close to someone here, that pet goes to *Rainbow Bridge*.

There are meadows and hills for all of our special friends so they can run and play together.

There is plenty of food, water and sunshine, and our friends are warm and comfortable.

All the animals who had been ill and old are restored to health and vigor; those who were hurt or maimed are made whole and strong again, just as we remember them in our dreams of days and times gone by.

The animals are happy and content, except for one small thing; they each miss someone very special to them, who had to be left behind.

They all run and play together, but the day comes when one suddenly stops and looks into the distance. His bright eyes are intent; His eager body quivers. Suddenly he begins to run from the group, flying over the green grass, his legs carrying him faster and faster.

You have been spotted, and when you and your special friend finally meet, you cling together in joyous reunion, never to be parted again. The happy kisses rain upon your face; your hands again caress the beloved head, and you look once more into the trusting eyes of your pet, so long gone from your life but never absent from your heart.

Then you cross *Rainbow Bridge* together.

Anonymous

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If you enjoyed Biscuit's story, please make a donation in his memory to:

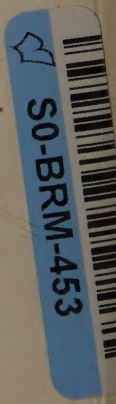
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